

Science-Fantasy

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TWO SHILLINGS

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Science-Fantasy

WINTER 1951-52

TWO SHILLINGS



RMB

The Time Is Not Yet . . .

The plans of publishers tend to go more oft apley, these days, than those of other men or mere mice. Which is why so many magazines which have started off with a flourish of trumpets in the past few years have suddenly stopped amid whisperings of crippling production costs, changing reading tastes and, now, the soaring cost of living.

Not all these factors apply adversely where science fiction is concerned. But while more and more readers are being attracted to science fiction, the continual rise in the cost of paper and the prevailing tendency for magazines to become a luxury are important considerations, with which the publishers of *SCIENCE-FANTASY* have had to contend since it was launched. Hence, with this third issue, the inevitable increase in price—which is to a great extent offset by the revised format, resulting in the reader actually getting a good deal more for his extra sixpence.

Because of the unavoidable delays that impede new publications such as this, the intervals between issues have been much longer than was intended. But *SCIENCE-FANTASY* is not going to “fold up,” as so many magazines in this field have done in the past—just so long as its sponsors are able to fulfil their pledge to serve the interests of British science fiction readers, as they appreciate them from long experience, by providing the best it is possible to produce as frequently as possible in these difficult times. It was with this object that Nova Publications was founded, and to which it will adhere so long as it can resolve the problems which make publishing such a precarious business to-day.

Since the last issue, however, it has become evident that the plan of development I had in mind for *SCIENCE-FANTASY* can hardly be carried through successfully at this stage—for a variety of reasons, which it is hoped may not obtain once the magazine gets properly into its stride and the special features I envisaged can be introduced with the full effect of topical interest and critical value.

For similar reasons, it has also been decided that *Science-Fantasy Review*, the most popular features of which were incorporated in this magazine, shall no longer be included in these pages. Though this may disappoint those readers who found the *Review* valuable as a guide to the enlarging field of science fiction, there is still the possibility that it may be revived as a separate entity, in which case they will be advised in good time.

Meanwhile, *SCIENCE-FANTASY* will continue to present the best selection of stories available from British and American writers, and will be edited entirely by John Carnell, who is also responsible for Nova's first publication, *New Worlds*. The thanks of all concerned are due to him for taking over the editorial chair which I have vacated, at least for the present. And so, to all my friends, best wishes and good reading, until we meet again.

WALTER GILLINGS

PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES

By JOHN WYNDHAM

When the people from the Future started visiting their ancestors, there was no privacy left. Like mothers-in-law, the problem was how to get rid of them!

Illustrated by QUINN

When I called round in the evening I showed Sally the paragraph in the *Daniel City News*.

"What do you think of that?" I asked her.

She read it, standing, and with an impatient frown on her pretty face.

"I don't believe it," she said, finally.

Sally's principles of belief and disbelief are things I never got a line on. How a girl can dismiss a pack of solid evidence like it was kettle steam, and then go and fall for an ad. that's phoney from word one as if it were holy writ, I never did . . . Oh, well, skip it—it just keeps on happening, anyway.

This para read:

MUSIC WITH A KICK

Patrons at a concert at the Adams Hall last night got a shock when they saw a pair of legs dangling knee-deep from the roof while the music was on. Seemingly everybody there saw them, and all reports agree that they were bare legs with some kind of sandals on the feet. They were visible for some three or four minutes during which they moved several times back and forth across the ceiling. Then, after some movement like kicking they disappeared upwards. Examination of the roof shows no traces, and the owners of the Hall are at a loss to account for the phenomenon.

"It's just one more thing," I said.

"So what?" said Sally. "What does it prove, anyway?" she added, apparently forgetful that she wasn't believing it.

"I don't know—yet," I admitted.

"Well, there you are then," she said.

Sometimes I get the feeling Sally doesn't go a lot on logic.

Most people, if they'd noticed it at all, would be thinking the way Sally was then. I was acting cagey on account of experience has shown me that a lot of threads can fit screws that don't belong, but already it looked like there were things happening that ought to be added together.

The first guy to bump up against it—the first I can find on record, that is—



PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES

was one Patrolman Walsh. Maybe other fellows saw things before that and just put them down as a new kind of pink elephant. But Patrolman Walsh's idea of a top-notch celebration rated around a couple of bottles of coke, so that when he found a head sitting up on the sidewalk on what there was of its neck he stopped to look at it pretty hard. The thing that upset him, according to the report he turned in when he'd run half a mile to the section-station and stopped gibbering, was that it looked back at him.

Well, it's not good to find a head on the sidewalk, and 2 a.m. makes it kind of worse, but as for the rest, you can get a reproachful look from a cod on a slab if your mind happens to be on something else. Patrolman Walsh didn't stop there, however. He said the thing opened its mouth "like it was trying to say something." If it did, he shouldn't have mentioned it; it just naturally brought the pink elephants to mind. On the other hand, why say it unless he thought it was so? But nobody in a respectable section-station wanted to hear a thing like that. However, he stuck to it, so after they'd bawled him out a bit and taken disappointing sniffs at his breath, they sent him back with another man to show just where he'd found the thing. Of course there wasn't any head—nor blood—nor signs of cleaning-up marks. Nor did anyone later report the loss of a head, white race, sallow complexion, clean-shaven, and mid-brown hair which was what he said it was. And that's all there was about the incident—save, doubtless, a few curt remarks on the conduct-sheet to dog his future career.

But Patrolman Walsh hadn't a big lead. Two evenings later an apartment house was curdled by searing shrieks from a Mrs. Rourke in No. 35, and simultaneously from a Miss Farrell who lived above her. When the neighbours arrived, Mrs. Rourke was hysterical about a pair of legs that had been dangling from her bedroom ceiling, and Miss Farrell the same about an arm and shoulder that had stretched out from under her bed. But there was nothing to be seen on the ceiling, and nothing under the bed beyond a discreditable quantity of dust.

There were some other little incidents, too.

It was Jimmy Lindlen who works, if that isn't too strong a word for it, in the office next to mine who drew my attention to the whole thing. Jimmy's hobby is collecting facts. In this he is what you might call the *reductio ad absurdum* of Sally. For him, everything that gets printed in a newspaper is a fact—poor fellow. He doesn't mind much what subject his facts cover so long as they look screwy. I guess he once heard that the truth is never simple, and deduced from that that everything that's not simple must be true.

He's not the only one. There was a fellow called Fort who was the arch collector of the improbable. From the time he was a kid Jimmy has revered this Fort as the savant of the era. Right on at an age when most fellows are getting more improbability than they want from their girl friends, Jimmy's desire to be baffled, bogged and bewildered never flags.

Now this Fort guy's method was to labour mightily with scissors and paste, present the resulting collation, and leave it to a largely indifferent world to judge whether nearly everybody wasn't wrong about most everything. But Jimmy's technique was different—and less cautious. I've never actually seen him at work on it, but at a guess I'd say he dealt himself a hand of cuttings

in which there was one constant factor, discarded the awkward ones, and then settled down to astonish himself as much as possible with theories about the rest. I got used to him coming into my room full of inspiration, and didn't take much account of it. I knew he'd shuffle and deal himself another hand that evening and stagger himself all over again. So when he brought in the first batch about Patrolman Walsh and the rest I didn't ignite much.

But some days later he was back with more. Maybe work was slack, or maybe I was surprised by his playing the same type of phenomena twice running. Anyway, I paid more attention than usual.

"You see. Arms, heads, legs, torsos all over the place. It's an epidemic," said Jimmy. "There's something behind. *Something's happening!*" he said, as near as you can vocalise italics.

When I'd read a few I had to admit that this time he had got something where the vein of queerness was pretty constant.

A bus driver had seen the upper half of a body upright in the road before him—but a bit late. When he did stop and climb out, sweating, to examine the mess there was nothing there. A woman hanging out of a window watching the street saw another head below her, doing the same—but this one was projecting out of the solid brickwork. There was a pair of arms which came out of the floor in a butcher's shop, seemed to grope for something, and then withdrew into the solid cement without trace—unless you count some detriment to the butcher's trade. There was the man on an erection job who became aware of a strangely dressed figure standing close to him, but in the empty air—after which he had to be helped down and sent home. Another figure was noticed between the rails in the path of a heavy freight train, but had vanished without trace when the train had passed. The dozen or so witnesses agreed that it was wearing some kind of fancy dress, but looked male.

While I skimmed through these and some others Jimmy stood waiting like a bottle of seltzer. I didn't have to say more than "Huh."

"You see," he said. "Something is happening."

"Supposing it is," I conceded cautiously. "Then what is it?"

"The manifestation zone is limited," Jimmy said, impressively. "If you look where I've marked the incidents on the city plan you'll see they're grouped. Somewhere in that circle is the 'focus of disturbance.'" This time he managed to vocalise the inverted commas, and waited for me to show that I was struck.

"So?" I said. "Disturbance of just what?"

He dodged that.

"I've a pretty good idea of the cause," he told me, weightily.

I rarely knew Jimmy when he hadn't, though it might be a different one an hour later.

"I'll buy it," I offered.

"Teleportation," he announced. "That's what it is. Bound to come sooner or later. Now someone's on to it."

"Huh," I said again.

"But it must be." He leaned forward earnestly. "How else'd you account for it?"

"If there could be teleportation, or teleportage, or whatever it is, I reckon there'd have to be a transmitter and some sort of reassembly station," I told

him. "You couldn't expect a person or object to be kind of broadcast and then come together again any old place."

"But you don't *know* that," he pointed out. "Besides, that's part of what I was meaning by 'focus'. It may be focused on that area."

"If it is," I said, "he seems to have got his levels and positions all to hell. I wonder just what happens to a guy who gets himself reassembled half in and half out of a brick wall?"

It's details like that that get Jimmy impatient.

"Obviously," he said, "it's early stages. Experimental."

It struck me as pretty uncomfortable for the subject, early stages or not, but I didn't press it.

That evening had been the first time I had mentioned it to Sally, and on the whole that was a mistake. After making it clear that she didn't believe it, she went on to reckon that if it was true it would be just another invention.

"What do you mean, 'just another invention'? Why, it'd be revolutionary," I told her.

"Should be," she said, "but not the way we'd use it."

"Meaning?" I asked.

Sally was in one of her withering moods, I could see. She turned on that voice which she uses for the stupidities of people and the world.

"We've got two ways of using inventions," she said. "One is to kill more people more easily: the other is to help short-sighted business goons to make quick easy money out of suckers. Maybe there are a few exceptions, like X-rays, but look at the line we've got with movies and radio. Look at airplanes, too. Can you or I just get a nice cheap little helicopter to keep in the backyard? Can we hell!"

Sal gets like that sometimes.

"Inventions!" she said, with as near a snort as she comes. "What we do with the product of god-given genius is first we ram it down to the lowest common denominator, then multiply by the vulgarest possible fractions. What a century! What a world! When I think of what other centuries are going to say of us it just makes me go hot all over."

"I shouldn't worry. You won't be hearing it," I said.

The withering eye was on me.

"I should have known. That remark is just about up to twentieth century standards."

"You're a funny girl," I told her. "I mean, the way you think may be crazy, but you do it. Now most girls' futures are all cloud-cuckoo beyond next season's hat or next year's baby. Outside of that it might snow split atoms for all they care—though down inside 'em they've got a feeling nothing's ever changed or ever will."

"A lot you know about what most girls think," said Sally.

"That's it. How could I?" I said.

She seemed to have set her face so firmly against the whole business that I dropped it for the evening.

A couple of days later Jimmy looked into my room again.

"He's laid off," he said.

"Who's laid off what?"

"This teleporting guy. Not a report later than Tuesday. Maybe he knows

somebody's on to him."

"Meaning you?" I asked.

"Maybe."

"Well, are you?"

He frowned. "I got it all figured out. I took the bearings on the map of all the incidents, and the fix came on All Saints Church. I've been all over the place, but I didn't find anything. Still, I reckon I'm close—why else'd he stop?"

I couldn't tell him that. Nor could anyone else. But that very evening there was a paragraph about an arm and a leg that some woman had watched travel along her kitchen wall. I showed it to Sally.

"Likely it'll turn out to be some smart line in advertisement," she said.

"Kind of secret ad?" I suggested.

Then, seeing the withering look working up again:

"How about a movie?" I suggested.

It was overcast when we went in to the movie; when we got out it was raining hard. Seeing it was under a mile to her place and all the taxis in town were busy, we decided to walk it. Sally pulled on the hood of her slicker. I took her arm. For a bit we didn't talk, then:

"Darling," I said, "I know that I am regarded as an irritating cluck with a low ethical standard. But have you ever seriously thought what an opportunity there is here for reform?"

"Yes," she said, decisively, and in quite the wrong tone.

"What I mean is," I told her patiently, "if you happened to be looking for a good work to devote your life to, what could be better than reformation? The scope is tremendous, now look at——"

"Is this a proposal of some kind?" Sally inquired.

"Some kind! I'd have you know that in spite of all my dubious ethics—— Good God!" I broke off.

We were in Tyler Street. A short street, as becomes a minor President, rainswept, and empty now except for ourselves. What stopped me was the sudden appearance of a kind of vehicle further along. I couldn't make it out very clearly on account of the rain, but I got the impression of a low built truck with several figures in light clothes on it crossing Tyler Street quite swiftly, and vanishing. That wouldn't have been so bad if there were any street crossing Tyler Street, but there isn't; it just came out of one side, and went into the other.

"Did you see what I saw?" I said.

"But how on earth——?" she began.

We walked on a few steps to the place where the thing had crossed, and looked at the solid brick wall on one side and the house-fronts on the other.

"You must have been mistaken," said Sally.

"Well, for—I must have been mistaken!"

"But it couldn't have happened, could it?"

"Now, listen, Honey——"

But at that moment a girl stepped from the solid brick, about ten feet ahead of us. We gawped at her.

I don't know whether her hair was her own, art and science can do so much together, but the way she wore it, it was like a great golden chrysanthemum a foot and a half across with a red flower set in it a little left of centre. It

looked terrible. She was wearing a kind of pink tunic. Maybe it was silk. It wasn't the kind of thing you expected to see in Tyler Street on a filthy wet night, but in sheer coverage it would have got by in a show most any place. What made it a real shocker was the things that had been achieved by embroidery. I never would have believed that a girl could—oh, well, anyway, there she stood, and there we stood.

When I say "she stood," she certainly did, but somehow she did it about six inches above ground level. She looked at us both, then she stared at Sally just as hard as Sally was staring at her. It must have been some seconds before any of us moved. The girl opened her mouth as if she were speaking, but no sound came. Then she made a forget-it gesture, turned, and walked back into the wall.

Sally stood quite still. With the rain shining on her slicker she looked like a black statue. When she turned so that I could see her face under the hood there was an expression on it that was new to me. I put my arm round her, and found she was trembling.

"I'm scared, Jerry," she said.

I was feeling more than a bit rattled myself, but she needed an act.

"No cause for that, Honey. There's bound to be a simple explanation some place."

"But it's more than that, Jerry. Didn't you see her face? She was exactly like me!"

"She was pretty much like," I conceded.

"Jerry, she was *exactly* like. —I-I'm scared."

"Must have been some trick of the light. Anyway, she's gone now," I said.

All the same, Sally was right. That girl was the image of herself. I've often wondered about that since . . .

Jimmy came into my room next morning with a copy of the *Daniel City News*. It carried a brief, facetious leader on the number of local citizens who had been seeing things lately.

"They're beginning to take notice at last," he said.

"How's your own line going?" I asked.

He frowned. "I guess it's not quite the way I thought. As I see it, it's still in the experimental stage all right, but the transmitter may not be around here after all. This may be just the area he has it trained on for testing."

"But why here?"

"How would I know. It's got to be some place—and the transmitter *could* be any place." He paused, looking portentous. "It *could* be mighty serious. Suppose the Russians had a transmitter, and could project things or people here by teleportation . . .?"

"Why here?" I said again. "I'd have thought Oak Ridge, or maybe Brooklyn Navy Yard—"

"Experimental," he said, reprovingly.

"Oh," I said, abashed. I went on to tell him what Sally and I had seen the previous night. "She sort of didn't look the way I think of Russians," I added.

Jimmy shook his head. "Might be camouflage. After all, behind that curtain they have to get their idea of the way our girls look from our magazines," he pointed out.



Which was about as far as we got.

Next day, after about seventy-five per cent. of its readers had written in to tell about the funny things they'd been seeing, the *News* dropped the facetious angle. In two days more the thing had become factional, dividing sharply into what you might call the Modern, and the Classical camps. In the former, schismatic groups argued the claims of teleportage against three dimensional projection or some theory of spontaneous molecular assembly: in the latter, opinions could be sorted to beliefs in a ghostly invasion, a suddenly acquired visibility of habitual wandering spirits, or the imminence of Judgement Day. In the heat of debate it was becoming difficult to know who had seen how much of what, and who was enthusiastically bent on improving his case at some expense of fact.

PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES

On Saturday Sally and I met for lunch. Afterwards we took the car en route for a little place up in the hills which seemed to me an ideal spot for a proposal. But at the crossing of Jefferson and Main the man in front of me jumped on his brakes. So did I, and the guy behind me. The one behind him didn't quite. There was an interesting crunch of metal going on the other side of the crossing, too. I stood up to see what it was all about, and then pulled Sally up beside me.

"Here we go again," I said. "Look!"

Slap in the middle of the intersection was a—well, you could scarcely call it a vehicle—it was more like a flat trolley or platform, about a foot off the ground. And when I say off the ground; I mean just that. No wheels. It kind of hung there from nothing. Standing on it, dressed in coloured things like long shirts or smocks were half a dozen men looking around them. Along the edge of the platform was lettered: PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES. One of the men was pointing out All Saints Church to another; the rest were paying more attention to the cars and the people. The cop on duty was hanging a goggling face out of his little traffic-control house. He bawled, he blew his whistle, then he bawled some more. The men on the platform took no notice. He got out of his box and came across the road like he was a volcano that had seen a nice place to erupt.

"Hey!" he bellowed.

It didn't worry them. When he got a yard or two away they noticed him, nudged one another, and grinned. The cop's face went purplish; his language was a pretty line in fission. But they just watched him with amused interest. He drew his stick, and went closer. He grabbed at a fellow in a yellow shirt—and his arm went right through him.

The cop stepped back. You could see his nostrils kind of spread, the way a horse's do. He got a hold on his stick and made a fine circular swipe at the lot of them. They grinned back at him as the stick went through them.

I'll hand it to that cop. He didn't run. He stared at them a moment, then he turned and walked deliberately back to his box; just as deliberately he signalled the north-south traffic across. The guy ahead of me was ready for it, he drove right at, and through, the platform. It began to move, but I'd just have nicked it myself had it been nickable. Sally, looking back, said it slid away on a curve and disappeared through the front of the First National Bank.

When we got to the spot I'd had in mind the weather had come over bad; it looked dreary and unpropitious, so we drove around and then back to a nice quiet roadside restaurant just out of town. I was getting the conversation round to the mood where I wanted it when who should come over to our table but Jimmy.

"Fancy meeting you two," he said. "Did you hear what went off at the Crossing this afternoon, Jerry?"

"We were there," I told him.

"You know, Jerry, this is something bigger than we thought—a whole lot bigger. That platform thing. These people are technically way ahead of us. Do you know what I reckon they are?"

"Martians?" I suggested.

He stared at me. "Gee! Now how did you guess that?" he said, amazedly.

"I sort of saw it had to come," I admitted. "But," I added, "I kind of feel

Martians wouldn't be labelled 'Pawley's Peepholes'."

"Oh, were they? Nobody told me that," said Jimmy, and went away sadly.

But he'd wrecked the mood.

On Monday Anna, our stenographer, arrived in the office more scattered than commonly.

"The most terrible thing just happened to me. Oh my, did I blush all over!"

"All over?" inquired Jimmy, with interest.

She scorned him.

"I was in my tub this morning, and when I looked up there was a man in a green shirt standing watching me. Naturally, I screamed at once."

"Naturally," agreed Jimmy. "And what happened then, or shouldn't I——?"

"He just stood there," Anna said, firmly. "Then he sniggered at me, and walked away *through the wall*! Was I mortified!"

In this particular case I wasn't certain of the answer, but Jimmy said:

"Very mortifying thing, a snigger—and at you, too——"

"That's not what I—what I mean is, things like that oughtn't to be allowed," Anna said. "If a man's going to be able to walk through a girl's bathroom walls, where's he going to stop?"

Which seemed a pretty fair question.

The boss arrived just then. I followed him into his room. He wasn't looking happy.

"What the hell's going on in this damned town, Jerry?" he demanded.

"I'd like to know," I told him.

"Wife comes home yesterday. Finds two incredible girls in the sitting-room. Thinks it's me. First bust-up in twenty years. Girls vanish," he said, succinctly.

"Sure," I said, sympathetically.

That evening when I went to see Sally I found her sitting on the steps of the house in the drizzle.

"What on earth——?" I began.

She gave me a bleak look.

"Two of them came into my room. A man and a girl. They wouldn't go. They laughed at me. Then they started—acting as if I weren't there. I—I couldn't stay there, Jerry."

Then, not altogether unaccountably, she burst into tears.

From then on it stepped up. There was a brisk if one-sided engagement on Jefferson next morning. Miss Dotherby, who was quite Daniel City's most respected D.A.R., was outraged in every lifelong principle by the appearance of four mop-headed girls who were giggling on the corner of Chestnut. Once she'd retracted her eyes and got her breath back, she knew her duty. She gripped her umbrella like it was her Grandad's sabre, and charged. She sailed right through them, smiting right and left, and when she turned round they were laughing at her. She swiped wildly through them again, and they kept on laughing. Then she started babbling, so somebody called an ambulance to take her away.

By the end of the day the town was full of mothers crying shame and

men looking staggered, and the mayor and the police were snowed under with protest and demands that somebody do something about it.

The trouble seemed thickest in that district that Jimmy had originally marked out. You *could* meet them elsewhere, but in that area you were liable any and every minute to encounter a gang, the men in coloured shirts, the girls with amazing hair-do's and more amazing decorations on their shifts, sauntering arm-in-arm out of walls, and wandering indifferently through automobiles and people alike. They'd pause anywhere to point out things and people to one another and go into helpless roars of silent laughter. What tickled them most was when folks got riled with them. They'd make signs and faces at them until they got them tearing mad—and the madder the funnier. They ambled as the spirit took them through stores, banks, offices and homes without a care for the raging occupants. Everybody started putting up "Private: Keep Out" signs: that amused them a lot.

You couldn't seem to be free of them any place in the area though they appeared to be operating on levels that weren't always the same as ours. In some places it looked as if they walked on the ground or the floor, but in others they were inches above it, and elsewhere you'd find them moving along as if they were wading through the solid surface. It was very soon clear that they could not hear us any more than we could them, so there was no getting at them that way. No notice seemed to do anything but whet their curiosity.

After three days of it there was chaos. In the worst affected parts there just wasn't any privacy any more. At the most intimate moments they were liable to wander through visibly giggling and guffawing. Folks began to complain the way Anna had, only more extensively. It was all very well for the police to announce that there was no danger, that the visitants couldn't *do* anything, so the best way was simply to ignore them. There are times and places when giggling bunches of youths and maidens take more ignore-power than the average guy's got. It sent even a placid fellow like me wild at times, while the women's leagues of this-and-that, the purity promoters and the like were living in a constant state of blown tops.

The news getting around hadn't helped, either. Newshounds of all breeds burnt the roads into town. They overflowed the place. Pretty well every street was snaked with leads to movie cameras, television cameras, and microphones, while the press photographers were having the snappy-shot time of their lives, and, being solid, were more nuisance than the visitants themselves.

But there was more to come. Jimmy and I happened in on the first demonstration of it. We were on our way to lunch doing our best to ignore visitants, as instructed, by walking through them. Jimmy was subdued. He'd given up theories on account of his facts had kind of submerged him. Just short of the lunch-bar we noticed that there was some commotion further along Main Street seemingly coming our way, so we waited for it. After a bit it emerged from a tangle of stopped cars further down and came towards us at some seven or eight miles an hour. Essentially it was a platform like the one Sally and I had seen at the Crossing that Sunday, but this was *de luxe*. There were sides to it glistening with new paint, red, yellow and blue, enclosing seats set four abreast. Most of the passengers were young, though there was a sprinkling of middle-aged men and women dressed in

a soberer version of the same fashions. Behind the first platform followed half a dozen others. We read the lettering on their sides and backs as they went past:

PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES ON THE PAST—GREATEST INVENTION
OF THE AGE

HISTORY WITHOUT TEARS—FOR \$10.00

SEE HOW GREAT GREAT GRANDMA LIVED

YE QUAINTE OLDE 20TH CENTURY EXPRESSE

SEE LIVING HISTORY IN COMFORT—QUAINT DRESSES—
OLD CUSTOMS

EDUCATIONAL ! LEARN PRIMITIVE FOLKWAYS—
LIVING CONDITIONS

VISIT ROMANTIC 20TH CENTURY—SAFETY GUARANTEED

KNOW YOUR HISTORY—GET CULTURE—\$10.00 TRIP

BIG MONEY PRIZE IF YOU IDENTIFY OWN GRANDAD/MA

Most of the occupants of the vehicles were turning their heads this way and that in gog-eyed wonder interspersed with spasms of giggles. Some of the young men waved their arms and addressed us with witticisms to the admiration of their companions. Others leaned back, bit into large yellow fruits, and munched. They cast occasional glances at the scene, but most of their attention was paid to the contents of their left arms. On the back of the next to last car was lettered:

WAS GREAT GREAT GRANDMA AS GOOD AS SHE SAID ? SEE
THE THINGS YOUR FAMILY HISTORY DIDN'T TELL YOU

and on the final one:

SPOT THE FAMOUS BEFORE THEY GOT CAREFUL—THE REAL
INSIDE DOPE MAY WIN YOU A *BIG PRIZE* !

As the procession moved away it left the rest of us looking at one another kind of stunned. Nobody seemed to have much left to say just then.

I guess that show must have been something in the nature of a grand premiere. After that you were liable almost any place about town to come across a platform labelled:

HISTORY IS CULTURE—BROADEN YOUR MIND

or:

KNOW THE ANSWERS ABOUT YOUR ANCESTORS
with full good-time loads aboard, but I never heard of a regular procession again.

PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES

The Mayor's Office was tearing what was left of its hair and putting up big notices left, right and centre about what was not allowed to "tourists"—and giving them a big laugh. The thing grew more embarrassing. A lot of those on foot got to coming close up and peering at your face, and then consulting some book or piece of paper they were carrying—after which they looked disappointed and annoyed with you, and moved on. I calculated there was no prize at all for finding me.

Well, work has to go on. We couldn't fix to do anything about it, so we had to put up with it. Quite a pack of families moved out of town for privacy and to spare their daughters from getting the new ideas about dress, and so on, but most of us had to keep on. Pretty near everyone you met those times looked dazed or scowling—except, of course, the "tourists."

I called for Sally one evening about a couple of weeks after the trolley procession. When we came out of the house there was a ding-dong going on down the road. A couple of girls with heads that looked like globes of gilded basketwork were scratching the living daylight out of one another. There was a guy standing by looking mighty like a proud rooster, the rest were whooping things on. We went the other way.

"It just isn't like our town any more," said Sally. "Our homes aren't our homes any more. Why can't they go away and leave us in peace, damn them! I hate them!"

But outside the park we saw one little chrysanthemum head sitting on apparently nothing at all, and crying her heart out. Sally softened a little.

"Maybe they are human," she said. "But why do they have to turn our town into a goddam Amusement Park?"

We found a bench and sat on it, looking at the sunset. I wanted to get her away out of it.

"It'd be grand to be off up in the hills now," I said.

"It'd be lovely, Jerry," she sighed.

I took her hand, and she didn't pull it away.

"Sally, darling—" I began.

And then, before I could get any further, two tourists, a man and a girl, had to come and anchor themselves in front of us. I was angry. You might see the platforms any place, but you reckoned to be free of walking tourists in the park, where there was nothing to interest them. —Or shouldn't have been. These two seemed to find something, though. They stood staring unabashed at Sally. She took her hand out of mine. They conferred. The man opened a folder he was carrying, and took a piece of paper out of it. They looked at the paper, then at Sally, then back at the paper. It was too much to ignore. I got up and walked through them to see what the paper was. There I had a surprise. It was a piece of the *Daniel City News*; obviously from a very ancient copy indeed. It was badly browned and tattered, and to keep it from falling to bits entirely it had been mounted inside some thin, transparent plastic. I looked where they were looking—and Sally's face looked back at me from a smiling photograph. She had her arms spread wide, and a baby in the crook of each. I'd just time to see the headline: "Twins for City Councillor's Wife," when they folded up the paper, and made off along the path, running. I reckoned they'd be hot on the trail of one of their goddammed prizes—and I hoped it would turn around and bite them.

I went back, and sat down again beside Sally. That picture had kind of



spoiled things—"Councillor's Wife" ! Naturally she wanted to know what I'd seen on the paper, and I had to sharpen up a few lies to cut my way out of that.

We sat on awhile; feeling gloomy, saying nothing.

A platform went by labelled:

PAINLESS CULTURE—

GET EDUCATED IN MODERN COMFORT

We watched it glide through the railings and into the traffic.

"Maybe it's time we moved ?" I suggested.

"Yes," agreed Sally, dully.

We walked back towards her place, me wishing that I'd been able to see the date on that paper.

"You wouldn't," I asked her casually, "you wouldn't happen to know any councillors ?"

She looked surprised.

"Well, there's Mr. Falmer," she said, kind of doubtfully.

"He'd be a—a youngish man?" I inquired, off-handedly.

"Why, no. He's ever so old. As a matter of fact, it's his wife I know really."

"Ah!" I said. "You don't know any of the younger ones?"

"I'm afraid not. Why?"

I put over a line about a situation like this needing young men of ideas.

"Young men with ideas don't have to be councillors," she remarked.

There again, like I said, Sal doesn't make a lot of bases on logic, maybe; but she's her own ways of making a guy feel better.

Next day found indignation right up the scale again. It seems there had been an evening service going on in All Saints Church. The preacher was just drawing breath to start his sermon when a platform labelled:

WAS GT. GT. GRANDAD ONE OF THE BOYS?—

OUR \$10.00 TRIP MAY SHOW YOU

floated in, and slid to a stop in front of the lectern. The preacher stopped dead. For some seconds he stood regarding it in silence. Then he crashed his fist down on his desk.

"This," he boomed, "this is *intolerable*. We shall wait until this *object* is removed."

He remained motionless, glaring at it. And the congregation glared with him.

The tourists on their platform had an air of waiting for the show to begin. When nothing happened, they started passing round bottles and fruit to while away the time. The preacher kept right on glaring. When still nothing happened, the tourists began to get bored. The young men tickled the girls, and the girls giggled them on. Several of them began to urge the man at the end of their craft, after a bit he nodded, and the platform slid away through the west wall.

It was the first point our side had ever scored. The preacher mopped his brow, cleared his throat, and then extemporised the sermon of his life, on the subject of "The Cities of the Plain."

But no matter how many and how influential the tops that were blowing, there was a big zero getting done about it. There were schemes, of course. Jimmy had one of them: it concerned either ultra-high or infra-low frequencies that were going to shudder the projections of the tourists to bits. Maybe something along those lines might have been worked out sometime, but right then it wasn't getting any further than being an idea. It's darned difficult to know what you can do about what is virtually a movie portrait in three dimensions, unless you can find some way of cutting its transmission. All its functions are going on not where you see it, but some place where the origin is. So how do you get at it? What you are actually seeing doesn't feel, doesn't eat, doesn't breathe, doesn't sleep . . .?

It was while I was considering what it *does* do that I had my idea. It struck me all of a heap—so simple. I grabbed my hat in one, and took myself round to the Mayor's Office.

By this time, a daily procession of highly carbonated citizens, threateners, and screwballs, had them acting pretty leary there, but I worked through at

last to a man who got interested, though doubtful.

"No one's going to like it," he said, uneasily.

"No one's meant to like it. But it can't be much worse than this—and it's likely to do something for trade, too," I pointed out.

He brightened a bit at that.

"The Mayor has his restaurants," I went on. "And I don't see why the whole town shouldn't make a bit on it, too, at that."

"I'll grant you've got a good why-not there," he admitted. "Okay. We'll put it up to him."

For all of three days we worked hard on it. On the fourth we went into action. Soon after daylight there were gangs out on all the roads into town setting up crossing-barriers at the city limits, and when they had those fixed, they put up big white boards lettered in red:

DANIEL CITY
THE COMMUNITY THAT LOOKS AHEAD
COME AND SEE
BEYOND THE MINUTE — NEWER THAN TOMORROW
SEE
THE WONDER CITY OF THE AGE
TOLL (NON-RESIDENTS) 25c.

The same morning the television concession was revoked, and papers all through the State and beyond carried large display ads:

UNIQUE ! — COLOSSAL ! — EDUCATIONAL !

DANIEL CITY
presents the only authentic
FUTURAMIC SPECTACLE

WANT TO KNOW:

WHAT YOUR GREAT GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER WILL WEAR ?

HOW YOUR GREAT GREAT GRANDSON WILL LOOK ?

HOW CUSTOMS WILL CHANGE ?

NEXT CENTURY'S STYLES ?

WHAT A HUNDRED YEARS WILL DO ?

COME TO DANIEL CITY AND SEE FOR YOURSELF

IT'S THE OFFER OF THE AGES

THE FUTURE FOR 25c.

We reckoned that with the publicity there'd been already we'd not need more detail than that—though we ran a few more specialised ads some places:

DANIEL CITY
GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS
THE SHAPES TO COME
SAUCY FASHIONS — CUTE WAYS
ASTONISHING — AUTHENTIC — UNCENSORABLE
GLAMOUR GALORE FOR 25c.

and so on. We took enough space to get mentions, too, in the news columns on account of those who like to think they are doing things for sociological, psychological, and other toney reasons.

PAWLEY'S PEEPHOLES

And they came.

There'd been quite a few running into town to see the sights before, but now they learned it was something worth charging money for, the figures went up steeply—and the more they went up, the gloomier the City Treasurer got on account of we'd not made it 50c. or even a dollar.

Within a couple of days it got so that we had taken over all vacant lots, and some fields further out, for car parks. When it came to evenings, that wasn't enough, and folk were parking far enough out for us to run a bus service to bring them in. The streets were so full of crowds stooging around and greeting any of Pawley's platforms with whistles, jeers and raspberries that the regular citizens mostly stayed indoors, and kind of smouldered there.

The lists of protests at the Mayor's Office grew longer each day, but he didn't have the time for that to worry him a lot, being so busy arranging special convoys of food and beer for his restaurants. Nevertheless, a few days of it started me wondering whether Pawley wasn't going to see us out, after all. The tourists didn't like it much, one could see, but that hadn't done a lot to curb their habits of wandering about all over the place, and now, in addition, we had trippers in their thousands whooping it up with pandemonium for most of the night. Tempers all round were getting short enough for real trouble to break.

Then, on the sixth night when several of us had begun to wonder whether maybe we oughtn't to leave town for a while, the first crack showed—a man in the Mayor's Office rang me up to say he'd seen several platforms with empty seats on them.

The next night I went down to one of their regular routes to see for myself. There was a well-seasoned crowd round there, jostling, shoving and exchanging cracks. I didn't have long to wait. A platform slid out on a slant through the front of Al's Place. The label on it read:

CHARM AND ROMANCE OF 20TH CENTURY—\$7.50

It was good to see Pawley cutting his rates—and there were half a dozen empty seats at that.

The arrival of the platform brought a well-supported Bronx cheer, and a shrilling of whistles. The conductor remained indifferent as he steered through the people filling the street. His cargo looked less certain. Part of it did its best to play up. It giggled, and made motions of returning slap for slap and grimace for grimace with the crowd to start with. Maybe it was as well the tourist girls couldn't hear the things the crowd was shouting to them, but plenty of the gestures were clear enough. I'd say it couldn't have been a lot of fun gliding straight into the men who were making them. By the time the platform was clear of the crowd and disappearing into Hogan's Store pretty well all the tourists had given up pretending it was, and some of them were looking kind of sick. By the expressions on one or two of the faces there I reckoned Pawley might be going to have a tough time explaining the culture aspect of it to a watch committee some place.

The next night there were more empty seats than filled ones.

The second night after that was busy on account of they didn't show up at all, and we had to get down to the job of returning the 25c., and refusing claims for wasted gas.

And the next night they didn't come, either; nor the one after that. So then all we had to do was to pitch right in with the job of cleaning up Daniel

City—and the reputation it had been getting lately—and the thing was pretty well over.

At least, we say it's over. Jimmy maintains that's only the way it looks from here. According to him, all they had to do was to modify out the visibility factor that was causing the trouble, and it's likely they're still peeping around—here and other places.

Well, he could be right, at that. Maybe the guy Pawley, whoever he is, or will be, has a chain of Fun Fairs operating all around the world and all through history right now. We wouldn't know—and just so long as he keeps them out of sight we'd not care a lot, either.

Pawley had been fixed as far as we were concerned. He had to be fixed some way—even the vicar of All Saints appreciated that; and he had something when he began his address of thanksgiving with: "Paradoxical, my friends, paradoxical are the uses of vulgarity."

And once it *was* fixed, I could find some time to go round and see Sally again. I found her looking brighter than she'd been in some weeks, and lovelier on account of it. She seemed pleased to see me, too.

"Hullo, Jerry," she said. "I've been reading in the paper how you got it all fixed to fade them out. And I think it was just wonderful of you."

A bit before, I'd maybe have taken that for a cue, but it didn't trigger right now. I kind of kept on seeing her with armfuls of twins, and wondering how they got there, in a dead-inside way.

"Go to, honey! It wasn't a lot. Any other guy might have hit the idea," I told her, modestly.

"That's maybe, but there's a whole lot of people don't think so. And I'll tell you another thing I heard to-day. They're going to ask you to stand for the Council, Jerry."

"Me, on the Council, that'd be a big laugh——" I began. Then I stopped, kind of smitten. "If—— Say, would that mean I'd be called 'Councillor'?" I asked her.

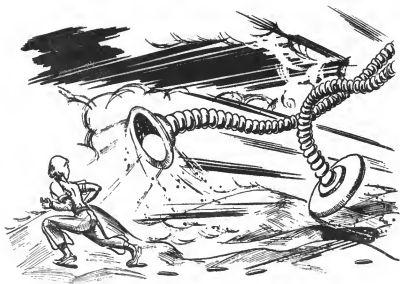
"Why—why, yes, I guess so," she said, looking puzzled.

Things shimmered a bit.

"Er—Sally, sweetheart, there's—er—something—something I've been trying to get around to saying to you for quite a while . . ." I began.

THE END





THE UNDYING ENEMY

By F. G. RAYER

*Only machines roamed the Earth—searching, searching—while underneath
the Sleepers waited for them to rust.*

Illustrated by CLOTHIER

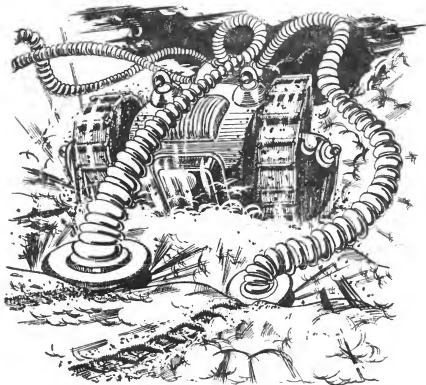
The dim rock tunnel ended at a thick glass door against which the boy pressed his nose. Beyond, under long illumination tubes, stood in shadowy mystery many rows of bunks and he gazed, fascinated, at the silent figures, each with hands clasped upon its stomach and covered with a white sheet, and at the cables and tubes which rose from the headpiece concealing each face to the ceiling-high gloom. A thin humming filtered through the thick glass door, but inside nothing moved. The bunks extended out of sight in receding perspective, each with its covered figure and descending leads. A whisper of slow footsteps came along the passage and he started away in guilt.

"Here again, boy?" The old man was fragile and stooped, with many wrinkles and a beard of glinting white silk.

The boy looked down, evading the reproving eyes. "It's so—lonely," he said.

The other nodded, his hairless head an egg that could not reach equilibrium. "Yet why look in upon them? It is not prudent."

SCIENCE-FANTASY



"Why, wise one?" Eager blue eyes looked up into the sad, aged grey. "They sleep so soundly——"

"That is our danger—we must not envy them."

A frail hand fell upon the lad's shoulder, guiding him away. "Come. I will tell you the story."

The boy nodded eagerly, hastening so that the hewn corridors and empty chambers echoed to his feet, and to his quick voice and thousand questions. They traversed the long corridor up which he had crept to gaze at the Sleepers and went into a room with two bunks. A bulb glowed overhead, lit by power he knew was generated below, for he clearly remembered the deep chambers where enormous automatic mechanisms whirled sleepily. The old man closed the door and sat upon the bunk.

"I was once a lad like you," he said slowly, "except that I had dark hair and you have blonde. You, in turn, will open the door and wake a child, who will come to manhood as you grow old, learning all you tell him."

The boy was wide-eyed with wonder, though he had heard this story many times before.

"You've been into the Chamber of the Sleepers?" he pressed, his hands tightly against his sides on the bunk with excitement.

"Yes, once. There is a key which you will see when you are older. But remember that the door is double and that compressed between its panels

lies a gas, so that to break it is death."

The boy nodded. "The story," he urged. "Tell me the story again."

The old man smiled. "When I was young I, too, was impatient. I walked these halls and chambers, going curiously to the glass door and through all the tunnels. Who had made them, I wondered, and why? What lay behind the far limits of our passages? Could the rock go on for ever infinitely? An old man was with me, and when I could read I learnt many new things. I was so eager for knowledge I would scarcely leave the library. When I was fifteen I was given the key to a shut room and I learned strange, unbelievable things."

He shook his head heavily and the boy fidgeted with excitement. These words hinted at new secrets to be unfolded. "I am nearly fifteen," he breathed.

"True, lad. My tutor said that he, too, had once been a lad, with an old man to teach him, and that the old man, in his turn, had said that long ago he himself was a boy, with a helpful, wise old man as companion. In the locked room will be instructions to be read by none but you. When the year draws near you will arouse one of the Sleepers, but your loneliness must not hurry that day, nor must you forget, leaving humanity to die."

The boy frowned. "Humanity? Many people?"

"Yes, many like you and I," the old man said. "Once there were many people so that each had a name. You will learn of such things. At first I did not understand, but understanding came. So it will with you. Many people thronged these halls, but they had not lived here always." He stopped with great emphasis.

The boy was silent with wonder. He realised that at each telling a tiny fragment was added to the story, so that he should learn slowly and understand fully.

"Once these many people walked fields and towns, seeing the sky and feeling the sun upon them." The aged voice grew dreamy. "They saw the sun and the heavens——"

"You use strange words!" Wriggling with the fear that he would not understand, the boy bounced upon the edge of the bunk, his blue eyes wide and his face anxious. "Tell me what these things are like!"

The old man shook his head sadly. "I have never seen them, but there are pictures in the locked room and you must be patient, learning all in the fullness of time. Once, my guardian said, there had been an apparatus, a machine, with which things above could be seen. He had never used it, for it was broken, but he said his tutor spoke of it. One day I will show it you, for there are many things you must begin to understand. Other places exist. There is the great above where the many people were, and vast beyond our understanding, for a man could travel for many days and not reach its end, not even if he had a machine to ride such as you will see in the pictures, and which went with terrible speed on wheels and in the sky."

He was abruptly silent, listening. The bulb dimmed; the undertone of the generators below sank in diminuendo and the boy was still. Before, but seldom, this had happened. As always, he saw the old man's face grow pale.

"The warning," he breathed, aged limbs shaking.

The boy was motionless except for a tiny involuntary tremor, remembering he had been taught that he must always be still when the light suddenly dimmed and the generators whirled at their lowest, quietest level. Sometimes

they waited many hours, sometimes only minutes. In the dimness he could see the old man trembling, and in the silence hear his own heart's beat. Above, perhaps half imagined, was a heavy scraping as of the movements of some ponderous body beyond vast thicknesses of rock. Minutes passed; the sound grew inaudible and the generators began to turn at normal speed. In the increased light the boy saw that sweat glistened on the old man's face and that he looked very tired.

"It was—*them*, lad," he said.

His voice was hushed and the boy trembled.

"Tell me more," he breathed.

"No, you will learn when the time comes. It is a terrible knowledge, and I am tired. You must prepare our food." He began to rock himself slowly on the bunk, his hands tight between his knees and his head bent so that his beard touched his chest. His cheeks were grey and the terror which had come as the sound scraped above seemed to have robbed him of strength. Once before he had lain upon the bunk, breathing heavily, the boy recalled, then had lifted his head and touched a thong about his neck.

"If you ever find me asleep, not waking, lad, take this key." His voice had been a sigh in the room. "You have often looked upon the door it fits, asking what is beyond. Take it, open, and learn what lies there. Remember your duty is great. You must not fail. Now go, for I must rest."

The boy had gone through the winding passages to a great steel door. Behind, the old man said, was stored terrible knowledge. The boy longed to enter, afraid yet fascinated, but understood the time had not yet come. Afterwards he had crept away to gaze at the Sleepers, then, tiring of even that, had gone into the room the old man called the children's library, which had been opened to him when his fifth birthday had come.

Now, as he prepared the food from coloured jellies and stringy substances hard to the teeth, he thought of the old man's words, wondering what the broken apparatus could be. Until recently he had accepted life as he found it, eating, sleeping and learning, but with each passing year the legends from his companion's lips interested him more and more, filling him with a wild, strange excitement. It all seemed some fantastic fairyland of which the old man spoke: some strange myth passed on by word down the ages, half unremembered, half unbelieving, yet evoking a poignant longing, and often bringing melancholy into the old man's eyes and voice as he talked on.

"What are—*they*?" the boy asked as he took in the meal.

Tears stood in the old man's eyes. "It is a terrible knowledge, lad, and you are young. Forget while you can. Afterwards we will see the machine of which I spoke."

They ate, facing each other in the hewn room with a single bulb above. Once, when it had ceased abruptly to shine, leaving the room so dark the power of vision might have ceased, the boy had changed it, bringing a new one from the store the old man had shown him.

"All the machines work by themselves?" he said, half questioningly, as he chewed a succulent vegetable which grew in warmed tanks below.

"Yes. They are self-controlling and very delicate, rarely needing adjustment. One day you may see them, but they are behind great glass doors and we must not walk among them. Many wonderful things are there, and a great clock with a huge hand. Legend says that when it has turned full circle the

Sleepers will arise, but the Library tells nothing of that. It was told me by my tutor, but may be untrue."

He became silent and the boy thought of the long rows of Sleepers, glimpsed through the door, each so completely still. Once, long before, he had noticed that one white sheet was stained and crumpled, rotting away into ribbed ruin, and that moisture dripped from it to the floor. He had called the old man, who stared through the glass panels, nodding sagely, and at last shuffled away.

"It is nothing, lad," he said. "When I was a boy there were two, far away down the right hand line."

The boy had not forgotten, and had crept back, peering awkwardly through the door. Just visible where the old man had said were two bunks where lay no neat shrouded forms, but odd, skeleton shapes like many fingered bone hands resting with their tips together, and protruding through tattered sheets. Not understanding but feeling uneasy, the lad shivered and hurried away.

After eating they went along a tunnel dimly lit and narrow and into the high, wide room where the broken machine stood. The old man gazed at it, stroking his beard pensively.

"My tutor said that once this machine showed a whole strange world above. He did not know on what principle it operated, except, except——"

He hesitated and the boy prompted him eagerly: "Except what?"

"That it caused a curvature in light-rays."

The old man became silent. Disappointed, the boy walked round the contrivance. A lens pointed upwards, surrounded by upright, slender rods, and before the machine was a cubicle. Visible inside the octagonal framework were upright burnished cylinders large as a man and connected by a bewildering intricacy of leads and tubes to each other and to apparatus below.

"Have you tried to repair it?" the boy breathed.

The old man shook his head. "It is beyond comprehension. What could anyone do with such a machine? We are helpless, and the ancients are not here to show us. I only know what I was told, and that one must stand in the cubicle in darkness, to watch."

"We could find what is broken!" the boy declared.

The old man shrugged unbelievably. "Try, it is a harmless pastime. I am too old to ponder on such things." He withdrew, and his slippered feet whispered away into the silence of the corridor.

The boy returned to the machine, hung his long outer garment, warm but hampering, on the cubicle door, and examined the apparatus minutely while the clock in their sleeping-room marked many revolutions of its hands upon the slowly mounting row of figures in a long, thin window above it. He did not understand the working of any part of the machine, but studied it carefully and at last came the moment when he found a tiny, bluish crystal tube from which projected three silvery legs. Yellow leads went to each outer leg, but the broken end of a red lead was poised a nail's thickness from the other. Excited, scarcely breathing, he inspected the other crystal tubes spaced round the core of the machine. All were exactly the same, but the red lead was joined to the centre leg on each.

For many long moments a strange fear and awe came upon him, then he carefully twisted the end of the red lead on its tag. Trembling, he went into

the cubicle and to the large switch the old man had shown him and drew it down.

A slow murmur awoke in the machine and a violet radiance played in the cubicle, slowly clearing so that the boy held his breath. For a long time nothing seemed to happen, then the cubicle became abruptly blue. Irregular greyish fluffy shapes drifted across it, rising slowly upwards, and a line of undulated brown came into view low down. The boy gazed, wide-eyed, and the brown, blue and fluffy shapes slowly began to pass away to the left. Far, far away on the very edge of the screen something moved, growing closer and clearer as the scanning rotation of the beam reached it and he stared in amazement. Abruptly he turned away and went running down the corridor.

The old man came hurriedly, muttering that it must be one of the "terrible ones," but gazed in astonishment. The boy thought the thing moving there oddly beautiful, and hung on his companion's words.

"Unbelievable," the old man breathed at last, and his voice shook. "It is a woman, a woman . . ."

Steel shod boots scuffed rhythmically through the peppery hills, leaving a winding trail in the saffron dust. Eyes stared ahead at the yellow plain, unmarked by movement or the artifice of men, or turned, sometimes, to look back, following for a moment the long trail which snaked across the slopes, up a valley, and from sight where the ochreous horizon met the sky. Away to the left, pole-like and corky, stood the remnants of old woodland. A delicate ear turned towards it, but no birds sang in the dead trees, no creature stirred under them, no man or machine moved among the brittle, fossilised trunks.

The feet went on, and the sun cast ahead the shadow of a beautiful woman, fine of face, firm and graceful of muscle and limb. She altered her direction slightly, and soon her shadow fell across the torn roofs of empty buildings nearly buried in the drifting brown particles. She paused, as if wondering what past knowledge of men lay buried here, hidden for ever as the sterile earth sifted into the great libraries of the world, then went on. A light wind moaned over the undulated brown, raising tiny eddies, and she began to hurry. Since growing things had relapsed their tenure upon the earth fearful dust-clouds often raced upon the screaming wind, so that a dark twilight came at mid-day and the sun was hidden. The poisoned, dusty soil rose many miles into the air, sweeping fantastically across whole continents. Rivers ran brown and no fin stirred in their polluted depths, or in the seas, tinted with the same noxious death.

Her footsteps came to a stream, and she halted. No plants grew upon its barren banks and the swirling brown water held no life. She followed its course, going down upon the plain, eyes searching always for something that lived.

Farther on, a crumbling town lay empty, the wind-driven sterile soil up to its second floor windows. She went through the tall buildings, upthrust through the dust like the relics of some ancient city, listening always, her eyes never still. Beyond a great building the curling wind had drawn away the all-pervading dust; the bonnet of a vehicle showed, and scattered bones, white in the sun. A newspaper flapped, uncovered by odd chance, yellowed and crinkly. She bent, touching the sheet lightly with gloved fingers, but it crumbled like a dry, fragile leaf into nothing.

She went on through the unpeopled city. Soon night would come, and she stopped, taking from her back a satchel made of thin chain-mail and lifting out a book. With a pointed instrument which left a blue line she wrote upon the thin steel pages.

The sun sank; a brilliant moon shone across the dusty hills, leaving clear-cut, inky shadows, and she went on. Once a sharp, clear crack came echoing through the night and she turned towards it, walking until she found herself among the sticks of a dead forest. Another bough broke, scattering a thin mist of fine earthy particles, and she turned away, her face expressionless . . .

The sun shone brightly as she approached a steel dome upon high rocks. Blown earth lay piled against one side, but the steps were half clean and she mounted slowly, her shod feet loud upon the naked rock. The dome had windows, and a sliding door which stood open, leaving a trickle of dust in the crack in which it rolled. She went in, looking each way, said "Do not be lonely," then stopped. No one was there. An eddying wind had swept dust in and it was undisturbed.

For a long time she stood motionless, listening to the sigh of the wind, now rising. Soon the poisoned, dusty soil would obscure the sun and silt into greater obscurity great buildings where lay the whole knowledge and history of mankind, unread for uncounted years.

As if at a loss and having no activity-pattern to respond to this, the unexpected, she stepped backwards. One steel heel caught in the groove in which the door slid and she fell backwards, jarring down the rocky steps. There, her head opened like a compressed tin-can; tiny wheels and electronic tubes sprang out and lay on the dust. One foot twitched, then she was still, her machinery silent, the mechanisms of her cogitation halted.

The rising wind swept long trails of dust across the peppery hills; a tree snapped, but no eye saw it fall, and no ear heard it, or the piping gusts carrying the saffron dust high in the obscured sky.

Eyes tingling from concentration, the boy had watched the figure pass from sight, walking quickly. Only then had he dared operate the controls which guided the seeing ray, but night came. Even when the cubicle showed dawn he could not find her and he left the machine feeling hungry and disappointed.

During the following days he often returned, but did not see the figure again. Once, on the rim of vision, a great shape moved, almost obscured by flying dust, yet massive and terrifying. He called, but the thing was gone before the old man entered the cubicle, nodding sagely at the description.

"One of the terrible ones. They tear the earth as with a devil's claw, and once, legend says, thrust their sting into the very heart of all man, so that he ran, screaming, but could find no refuge. In those days wise men said that the terrible ones would run with fire and tumult until there were no more men."

"What are they?" the boy whispered.

"I do not know, lad."

"But the great library?"

"It tells nothing of them. I only know what was said by my aged tutor, and that had been related to him in his turn. The terrible ones tore the body of living men, he said, and the rivers ran red and cities burned to the lowering sky. Happiness was no more, nor green, nor did any living things move in all



the air, upon all the land, or stir in all the waters of the earth."

"But the woman," the boy pressed eagerly.

The old man shook his head in puzzlement. "They would wish to kill her, with the last sons and daughters of all men, leaving earth a wilderness where no living thing moves."

"They move," the boy pointed out.

"They move," the old man agreed, his face grey under the single bulb. "But legend says they do not live."

He was silent and the boy saw that he had learned all the old man knew, but a restlessness came upon him. He left the cubicle door open and thought of the world above, of the slender figure walking through the dust, and of her danger, and knew that he must go up.

"You have never been above?" he asked as they ate before sleeping.

The old man shook his head as if very tired. "Never; it would betray the whole remnant of living man, the legend says. The beasts on the hills are quick as an adder, and powerful, and long to spread their poisonous gas upon

all men. My tutor was told how we must wait, guarding the Sleepers, that perhaps one day when the clock has turned full circle the reign of the terrible ones will be ended."

As he concluded the light dimmed; the engines far below droned softer and the burrowings were hushed as with fear. Immeasurably distant, like the scratching of a horny insect on thin metal, sounded a slow scraping and the earth vibrated as with the passage of some huge body.

The old man's face was grey and moist. "They are coming more often," he breathed. "Do they suspect? If they find us there can never again be any more men."

He trembled and his suppressed terror communicated itself to the lad, who shook as with ague, gripping the bunk. He thought of the beautiful woman and the extremity of peril threatening her and knew that he must go up to the surface, whatever dangers his act caused.

After many days he learnt that there was a way up, prepared for the Sleepers, but that it had never been trod since they had filed into the earth and lain down to dream. No one should know of it, the old man told him; it was secret knowledge of the Sleepers. But when his tutor had entered the Chamber to arouse him to his duty one of the Sleepers had been moving upon his bunk, the apparatus off his face, and had talked of a door and a tunnel, thinking the hour of awakening had come. Afterwards he had died, white with terror. The old man tried to point out the bunk, but it was so far from the glass door they could not see its emptiness.

The boy found the door through which none had ever been. Thrilling strangely he hurried back, calling, but the old man did not answer. He was still on his bunk, his hands folded on his chest and his eyes closed. The boy shook him, calling loudly; then was abruptly silent. For a long time he sat looking at the old man, whose white beard jutted up, then everything he had been told began to return like whispers in the room.

"When you find me asleep, not waking, take the key. Afterwards carry me to the little steel door at the end of this corridor, drop me through, close it."

He took the thong and placed it round his neck; for a moment the key was cold on his chest. He lifted the old man, astonished at his lightness, and carried him to the steel door. Open, it showed a narrow, black shaft leading downwards to where red glowed as from everlasting fires. He slipped the body in, watched it disappear with a sudden swish, closed the door and went away.

He walked the corridors, trying to escape from his own loneliness, often halting to listen for the old man's slippers on the rock. He ate, slept, and awoke knowing that his plan to go *up* could now be soon fulfilled. Perhaps the woman would even come below, to be his companion, so that they could be safe, and neither lonely . . .

As he prepared the old man's voice seemed to echo faintly there, as if his spirit still lived and strove to give a warning.

"The terrible ones are formidable beyond all expressing. They strive to discover where the Sleepers lie. Their aim is unchanging beyond man's understanding, their power great. They see with a vision outside the spectrum used by men, and move with a life not like ours. They spin endlessly at their work; never hasten, yet are never slow, though seasons wax

and wane across the world they never tire."

The door was secured by a means he could not understand, but after two long periods of work he burrowed round it. Ahead was a passage, rising slightly and extending farther than his light penetrated. He withdrew over the fragmented rock to get food and contrive a haversack.

The tunnel was long and old falls made piles upon the floor. A fault sheared the way so that he had to scramble down a rubble-filled funnel on cut hands and knees to gain the floor ahead. Many hours came and went; his eyes ached from staring into the blackness beyond his torch beam; his legs hurt and twice he sat down, eating and moodily wondering if the tunnel ever ended. Often he crept over loose rubble, a broken roof near his head, but at last blue showed and he emerged upon the higher slopes of a great hill, startled, amazed, and with his eyes streaming from such light as he had never before seen.

Down the hill unroofed buildings made squares in the billowing dusty brown; behind them a haze of flying particles rode the breeze he felt on his cheeks. Beyond the swirling wisps shapes moved, enormous and grotesque and he shrank back into the hole in fear. They were dissimilar in size and form and as the dust thinned he saw they moved around a spidery tower pointing high into the obscured sky. Then the wind grew keener; dust flew higher and the scene was hidden from view, though his ears caught an intermittent high-toned note, audible across the whole valley and setting chill fingers on his spine.

Feeling hidden by the rising dust he went over the hill, squinting against the flying particles, which made a deep brown twilight. Half way down the opposite slope the air cleared abruptly and the configuration of the hills was familiar. He searched eagerly but found no footprints, then went rapidly down the hillside and across the plain.

The sun shone on a metal dome, silted round by blown dust. There was no movement; no one came to greet him, nor did any sound break the quiet. He walked round slowly, noting that at one place hewn steps had led up to it, but now merely descended from sight into the powdery soil. The dome was a hundred paces round, and a sliding door stood open near the steps. Blown earth made a long ridge against the interior wall, and he entered.

The brown dust lay everywhere. Inside the door feet appeared to have disturbed it, but he could not be sure because the wind had driven in a new layer. The interior was divided into sections, each, he thought, equipped just as if a man had wanted to live there. One door was fastened and would not open. One gave access to a room containing a machine like that below, another, to a workshop. The last swung wide at his touch and inside there was less dust, a bed, a mirror, and books, and a few pictures on the wall. One was of a lad, brown-skinned and tall; clear-eyed, lean and blonde. The boy looked for a long time, still with amazement; looked in the mirror, then again at the picture. He knew, then, that he was not mistaken: the photo showed himself. The frame was aged, dry as cork and immeasurably old. He sat down upon the bed, looking at it, not thinking because the power of thought had momentarily flown.

Wind sang round the dome. The boy went to the door, but choking particles raced by, sweeping from the barren hills. For long hours the wind

piped and drummed as upon a tambourine, swirling its brown earthen fog past the open door and reducing visibility to a single pace. Night came, and still the wind sang. The boy slept, and awoke at early dawn to find that the wind was gone. The air was clear and from the door he looked down a score of hewn steps. The dome stood on an up-jutting rock, bared now of the surrounding dust and at the bottom of the steps lay a form, still half concealed.

He ran down, dropping to his knees to scrape away the dusty earth. Then he saw the limbs and head, and sat back upon his heels, his frantic attempts at rescue ended. The woman was metal, polished and beautiful, yet with a split across her skull and a sight of tiny, compact electronic machinery, choked with soil.

He stood up, fear conquering disappointment, as he remembered the old man's words. Was this machine a trick of the terrible ones? He looked round quickly, trembling, but all was silent. No sound came across the sterile hills; no shapes moved in the brilliant sunlight, or in the long, sinuous shadows.

He retreated up the steps, hiding until he should decide what to do. He searched again and was confronted by the closed door. He would get behind it, he decided; he could not leave without knowing what secrets lay hidden.

He found tools and began sawing through the lock, until after an apparent infinity of work the steel parted. He wiped his brow and opened the door cautiously. It had fitted well and only a faint haze of dust lay on the floor inside. Opposite, sitting upright in a steel chair, was an old man with golden hair and a combed beard. He was dressed in thick brown material; his face and eyes expressed pleasure and he stood up, stepping forward so that his feet rang on the steel floor.

"Do not feel lonely, Master," he said. "The Sleepers live, and therefore you are not the last of men. Let me talk, for I am wise."

The boy started back, remembering the woman, and terror, very real but with its cause incomprehensible, flooded through him. The old man followed him through the door, walking rhythmically. The boy saw that one knee of his garment was crumbled away to fragmented fibre through some touch of damp or mould.

"I will talk, Master," the voice promised, following. "I will talk of the past, when the Earth was quick with living things or of the present, when the worst days are upon us, or of the future, when the Sleepers arise."

Still he approached, and the boy halted, quivering. "Stay where you are!"

"As you wish, Master." He halted, the voice unchanged. "Do not despair; remember only that the Sleepers must be guarded. All else is nothing. Be tranquil, Master. Talk with me, or order, that I may fulfil."

The boy stared at the metal joint visible through the torn garment, and at the radiant face.

"Tell me of the Sleepers," he whispered.

The old man beamed. "Little to tell, Master. They will arise full of wonder, but your sons are among them, each in his turn to guard them, keeping his secret until the last library is opened, and treating as a son each brother who comes next. In them lies salvation for men."

The boy's thoughts spun as down a precipice and a hundred tiny memories which had meant little came back. The old man's loving care; the similarity

of eyes and features; the myriad controls in a small room at which he looked each day, sometimes making infinitesimal adjustments. Once, when very tiny, before such things had become so familiar that he disregarded them, the boy had questioned him. "I work that the Sleepers rest long and soundly," the old man had said, his eyes grave. The boy shivered, remembering the bunks where the sheets lay in unclean ruin.

"The Sleepers cannot sleep—untended?" he breathed.

The face before him beamed. "Not with safety, Master. But they are cared for, until the Awakening. Be easy, Master."

"How long have you sat there?" the boy whispered.

"Merely moments, Master. For me, all eternity is an instant. I do not grow old, nor, resting, do I eat. Even you, Master, once said I was as our terrible enemy, who can wait while men grow old and die." He beamed, and the boy felt sick at heart. "While the Sleepers are safe we need not fear our enemy," the voice droned on. "'Protect them, my sons,' you prayed. 'Upon them shall depend all that is to be of man, and whether he become but a word now never spoken on an empty Earth'."

Protect them! the boy thought. He sprang down the steps and began to run across the undulated dusty earth. Only when he was on a hilltop did he realise how vain his search must be, for no footsteps remained. The dust-storms might have obliterated the tiny tunnel entrance, which could be anywhere on the convoluted hillsides, where the dunes seemed to march from dawn until night, and where little waves stood in irregular corrugations, breathing from their peaks tiny wisps of brown powder.

He searched until nightfall without finding the tunnel, then sat down upon the dry, dusty earth and wept.

He awoke to find the old face, a beaming mask in the moonlight, bending low over him.

"Master, one of the terrible enemy is coming."

The boy rose, listening. Far away sounded a mighty scraping like a giant dragging his feet on iron.

"There is—danger?" he asked, scarcely breathing.

"Death, Master." The old face beamed at him. "Come away. We must hide."

"I cannot find my way to the Sleepers."

"No one knows it, Master, so that, not knowing, they cannot betray. Only you live here. If there were other men they would not know, for they might be tortured and free their secret. There are no records, for the enemy might discover them. Even when you made me you did not tell me where the entrance was."

The boy looked at him, frowning. "You mistake me for someone else!"

The old man teetered on his feet as if not understanding. "Come away," he said, and began to retreat towards the dome. The boy watched him, but when he reached the moonlit top of the rise his rhythmic steps faltered. For a full minute he stood motionless, face beaming, stiff as a pole, then abruptly folded like hinged levers into a heap. The merest line of thin smoke began slowly to ascend.

The boy listened to the dull scraping, approaching up over the hill beyond the toppled form. A huge hump showed, with long arms like bat's wings

with no membrane folded each side. One arm reached out, rolling the still form over like a child's toy. The arm withdrew; the hump slewed, rising over the hill.

With a vigour born of complete fear the boy began to wriggle down into the dusty earth until he was almost concealed, a mere elongated hillock amid the many vales and ridges of blown soil. Head strained frantically sideways, he watched.

The shape came over the hill and the earth shook. On its back two saucers wide as the boy could have spanned with outstretched arms swayed slowly as if endeavouring to locate anything that moved upon the hills. The sides of the object were low upon the ground, concealed caterpillar tracks churning up a thin wake of floating brown motes as it came down the hillside. The boy scarcely breathed, seeing that if it did not change its course it would come directly upon him. Gaining speed, it seemed to fill all the sky and purred gently; was gigantically wide and awesomely huge, and at the last moment the boy started up from his hiding place, his limbs trembling as if already crushed. Crying as he ran, he sprang up the hillside, looking back often.

The gigantic saucers rotated slowly, oscillated, and faced him. The shape slewed, flinging soil high, following and gaining momentum, its bat arms extended, casting long, grotesque shadows. He ran on, stumbling, panting, changing his direction often, his heart pounding and his hands outflung like those of a person in a nightmare. Soon he lost all idea of direction; there was only the curving hillside, the loose soil silvery in the moonlight, and the following enormity, always nearer, its saucers following every movement. He scrambled up a steep incline where the rock had been swept bare, paused on the top, lungs heaving, and looked back.

The thing came on, treads flinging rubble high, inner machinery snarling. The boy screamed, turned, slipped, and found himself in a narrow rocky cleft. Thunderous sound came up the incline and a dark shape halted above. A jointed arm moved and one saucer projected over the side of the cleft, moving in a searching scanning sequence. Sobbing, he heaved himself under the thing and to its rear on hands and knees, reeled to his feet, hesitated, and sprang, lying flat on its back trembling.

The surface was completely cold and his trembling subsided as the vehicle moved slowly twice along the full length of the cleft, one saucer projecting over the edge. Then both saucers rotated slowly in synchrony, scanning all the hills. For a long time came only a low whirring, then the machine turned down the incline, retreating, and he knew for the moment he was undiscovered.

As they rolled forwards, rising and falling to the dunes, he began to search the back on which he rode with his eyes and fingers, every movement infinitely cautious. There was a trapdoor; his fingers found fastenings and with a start he realised they were of a type which could only be operated from the outside. He wondered what that meant, then slowly began to work them loose. When both were undone he gathered his muscles so that he could fling back the trap and enter with one movement, and shot down feet first, toes kicking until they met a ladder, where he clung, drawing the trap shut. The machine had not halted. He spun round; found that the interior was illuminated weakly and deserted. A narrow footway stretched from the ladder. He passed between panels of unknown purpose, and came to the end. There were no seats; no places of any kind where any man or creature could sit or

rest, to operate the machine. There was only the narrow way and ladder, and, each side, masses of apparatus. Abruptly he realised the machine was empty because it had never been intended that any man or creature should ride in it.

Momentarily stilled with wonder, he clung to the ladder, his body swaying to the motion, his ears filled with the drone of the motor and the intermittent sounds coming from unseen controlling mechanisms.

Eventually motion ceased. He mounted the ladder and peered through a narrow horizontal slit made by slightly opening the trap. Vehicles of vast size and great diversity of form almost surrounded him, some built as huge containers, others armoured, with strange weapons projecting from their sides, and from rotating turrets upon their backs, where, on each, a metal rod stood. Some resembled that in which he was hidden, and yet others were fitted with tubes with fine nozzles. All lay still in ranks and he saw that many vacant spaces existed in the lines, and that some vehicles were rusted and clearly inoperative. One container was corroded to a shell. Dark fluid had run from it, eating a fissure in the vehicle's side and staining the earth for many yards around. Far ahead was a spidery tower topped by aerials.

He looked the other way and saw he was at the edge of the concourse of machines, noting that except for a faint humming the one in which he was hidden had ceased activity. The saucer scanners faced the distant tower as if awaiting some signal. He lifted the hatch and wriggled out, lying on the cold steel. Nothing happened and he slithered to a tiny platform, and from there to the earth, pressing his body flat against the back of the machine. He stood for long minutes, only his eyes moving, and noted that twenty paces away a dip ran obliquely up across the hills. Satisfied, he sprang forwards.

In the shadow, sheltering trough he hugged the brown dust, listening. No sound of wheels whirring in pursuit came and he began to scramble along, keeping the earthen rampart between himself and the machines. Only when he had laboriously ascended and crossed the first low hills did he rise to his feet.

Brown dunes lay ahead, and judging this the direction he walked on quickly, often looking back and listening. When two ridges of hills were behind him he sat down to rest and eat a little food from his pack. The brown dust had filled his boots; he emptied them and surveyed the dunes critically. The dust was fine, dry and powdery; only where the wind had removed it was rock revealed. His feet tingled and the dust seemed poisoned and sour, as if blended with noxious chemical traces. When his food was gone he would starve, he thought sadly.

He halted at the next hilltop, ears straining. Far ahead was a voice, upraised, yet unintelligible from distance. He ran towards it, feet sinking with each step, and passed over a ridge. Ahead was a shiny object flat on its back and babbling at the unheeding sky. He slowed, disappointed.

The beaming face gazed up; one metal leg did not move, but the other bent and stretched, scuffing a deep furrow.

"Do not be lonely, Master, though on all the earth are only the fighting machines made to battle against men. Remember you have caused the Sleepers to lie at rest until our enemy has rusted into nothing and have sacrificed your sons to guard them. You are not responsible for this sterility. You did not want poison sprayers, nor individual-seekers to terrorise our enemy."

"You mean my father," the boy said, but the face still beamed and the boot scuffed as if some interior fault prevented comprehension.

"The day will come, Master, when the son who is blond like you, among all the sons who were dark as their mother, shall grow to manhood, and the Sleepers awake, and return upon the earth, bringing grain and the animals which sleep with them."

The boy touched his head, knowing it blond. Abruptly the figure began to wail upon a shrill note.

"Woe if the Sleepers are untended or awake with our enemy still on the earth! Woe if they arise and our enemy has not rusted to dust, for they will be slain. Woe if the mechanisms falter, so that the Sleepers die terribly under the earth!" The words ran faster and faster. The boy sat on the poisoned soil, not listening, but wondering at what he had heard. He gazed at the dome, knowing no one would be visible there. Innumerable seasons had come and gone since his father had inhabited this refuge, apparently spending his whole life trying to destroy the enemy. At last the wailing grew thin and the smiling form was stilled.

For two days he sought the tunnel entrance without success. He returned to his sanctuary, examining its scanty contents anew, and finding a book of thin metal pages covered with blue writing. Filled with an odd wonder, he sat down to read.

"Jan. 9th, 2091. Finished erecting pre-fabricated sections. Dome is immobile, therefore machines will not attack. Stores lamentably insufficient."

"Feb. 17th. Machines all day yesterday spraying slopes of hills east. All grass and herbage yellow to-day and trees shedding leaves. Spraying vehicles still working beyond hills."

He turned several sheets to a date five years later. "April 2nd. Saw no machines; went to hilltop. All visible terrain yellow. Dust clouds bearing poisoned soil are beginning as summer approaches."

"May 29th. Was chased by individual-seeker, but gained dome. Machine halted outside."

"June 3rd. Machine still there. Dare not go out. Working on robot to do light tasks and reduce loneliness."

"June 10th. Machine went away. Read all day to robot speech-recorder. Can think of no new means to defeat machines; they retaliate fiercely when attacked. Consider initial plan best. When the Sleepers awake the machines will surely be worn out . . .?"

The boy shivered involuntarily, leafing through many closely-written pages.

"Jan. 17th. Air all day filled with poisoned dust. Assume little vegetation anywhere exists to retain moisture and soil. Remember self-motivated poison-sprayers were sent into all four major areas of war. Substance used enormously potent."

"Feb. 5th. Wish I had not stayed here alone. Always remember it was Feb. 5th Committee decided machines should have no radio-control so that enemy could not jam signals or gain control when machines were near."

"Aug. 6th. This was day first fighting machines returned, and could not be controlled because our transmitter had been bombed. Remember panic and own people running through streets, though so long ago . . ."

The boy saw he was nearly twenty years from the date of the first entry.

"Dec. 25th. Had Mobo read to me all day. Very tired. Fear illness. Viki completed. She works well."

"June 2nd. Went to hilltop overlooking marshalling point of machines. Radio tower obviously inactive. Machines return here from each foray in accordance with pre-set controls. Went too near and was chased by individual-seeker. Its one track was faulty and it could not maintain straight course. But must be more careful."

"July 1st. Wish I could reach radio tower, repair it and radiate signal halting machines activity. Machines pre-set to respond to signals from no other locality. The Committee's safeguards to prevent enemy gaining control of our fighting machines too complete and damnable!"

"July 7th. Dust storm arising. May try to reach tower. Committee should never have devoted whole productive capacity to self-controlling war machines, leaving humans defenceless. Hope to transmit code signal halting machines if tower can be repaired."

It was the last entry.

That night a storm exceeding in severity any the boy had seen began; wind drummed on the dome and powdered earth flew in choking clouds. Day was a mere brown half-light and slipped imperceptibly into darkness, when the wind fell, until dawn brought a clearing sky with only puffs of dust dancing across the hills. The silence became oppressive and the boy wished the cherubic robot had not collapsed. He went into the darkened cubicle of the light-bending machine and played with the controls. The storm had created new ridges and up to the farthest range of the apparatus they stretched in arid dunes devoid of living thing or the work of men. He focused upon the marshalling point and saw the machines waiting there still, rank upon rank in thousands. But the radio tower had collapsed in the storm and was half hidden in the dust. As he saw it, a growing hope born of the last diary note died. He frowned at his father's photo, immeasurably old, then he walked round the dome, glad the wind had hidden the metal woman, whose one arm had begun to wave unceasingly as if seeking help. Night came, clear and cool, clouds hiding the moon, and he ventured to the top of the nearest hill, listening for the approach of any machine which might destroy him.

A luminous shape was coming up the slope without sound. An odd, irregular cone, scarcely as large as he, and ghostly. It was approaching smoothly and must pass close; he hesitated, then stepped forward to intercept it. It came nearer, as a phantom cloak, and he reached for it. His hand passed through. Completely without sound, like the projection of a moving picture, it went on in a long, gentle curve, receded down the hill and from sight. He stared after it, eyes wide, wondering if it could have been some figment of his tired mind.

He sought the dome but could not sleep, remembering the ghostly movement of the object across the hills. Midnight had gone when realisation came with sudden shock. It had been an image of his coat upon the cubicle door of the machine in the cavern! Astounded, bewildered, he tried to reject the knowledge, but at last decided he could not.

He puzzled until dawn. The machine bent light, he thought. Normally, two-way vision existed over straight paths, but it made the paths parabolic, and the apparent movement of the hanging garment was caused by the scanning motion of the apparatus, which still functioned. The cubicle should be kept

in darkness so that the watcher would be unseen, but he had left the door open and light filtered in from the tunnel.

He entered the cubicle of the machine in the dome, closed the door and switched on. The war vehicles round the ruined tower showed as through a powerful telescope, the sun shining on their weapons, tracks and turrets. For a long time he stood in the dim cubicle watching them and thinking deeply.

Evening shrouded the hills when the boyish figure appeared over a rise, his blond head shining, and walked towards the silent fighting vehicles. His steps were light and his arms swayed as he came like a wraith along the slopes. An individual-seeking machine below awoke to life; its saucers turned, followed him, and its tracks flung back pulverised earth. It lurched into life, gaining speed, its gigantic metal arms reaching out.

The boy walked on, looking at it, gliding with unhurried steps straight towards the many ranks of machines. An armoured fighting vehicle awoke, its turrets turning to follow his motion and its scanners rocking, conveying information to the complex mechanisms inside. The individual-seeker was very close, running like a mighty beast with outstretched claws. It grasped at the figure, seemed to miss, and was carried past by its momentum. It slewed, its saucer scanners rotating to discover its prey, walking on across the plain.

The fighting vehicle arose in thunderous life; simultaneously its turrets began to hammer out sound and mighty bolts erupted vast clouds of earth about the boy's form, leaving smoking craters to testify to the awesome power of each missile. Still the wraith moved on, now among the machines themselves.

Silent hulks rose into activity and for long hours guns burned red across all the plain, sending up clouds of smoke which were illuminated fitfully from beneath. Through the holocaust the boy walked, while engines snarled and vehicles pirouetted, spewing destruction at the riven soil and at each other as they clashed at short range, or at the ghost that walked unharmed amid the fury. Explosions made the heavens quiver; the night shone bright with the fury of weapons, and rang loud with the scream of machinery and the clangor of destruction. Always purposeful, sometimes changing direction, the figure walked through the smoking havoc while missiles rained awesomely around him and tracks churned great furrows across the shivering hills. The sky echoed and a great cloud of smoke drifted slowly on the wind. At last, when dawn was near, the sound decreased; the sun came up upon a silent earth where a figure stood like the wraith of a nether world . . .

Swaying slightly, dizzy from marking time for many long hours, the boy switched off the lights he had fitted to illuminate the cubicle and went outside the dome, sitting abruptly on the top step, exhausted.

Silence overlay the distant hills, where smoke rose sullenly. Spent, he slept, his back to the open door, awaking only when the sun came warm upon him. He went over the hills and gazed upon the chaos of ruined machines. Only one gun turret followed him, but the vehicle was on its side, its tracks twisted, and the weapon did not fire. Awed by the vastness of the destruction, he withdrew, to halt, his face suddenly alight. Men and women were coming up out of the hill . . .

THE END

SCIENCE-FANTASY



DOUBLE TROUBLE

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

Everyone has at some time experienced those days when "everything goes wrong." A little matter of a hoodoo.

Illustrated by QUINN

DOUBLE TROUBLE

On Monday morning George Gray stepped out of the bathtub. It was a large bathroom and the cake of wet soap on the floor was very small, but George's instep alighted unerringly on the soap. He performed a complicated acrobatic trick of the sort which is usually preceded by a hush and a roll of drums, and followed by terrific applause. There was no applause this time. George sat naked on the cold floor and decided that his neck was not broken, but that all his ribs undoubtedly were.

At the breakfast table his newspaper tore as he opened it, right across his favourite comic strip. He tried to hold the two pieces together with one hand while he reached with the other for his toast. But he'd forgotten to switch the electric toaster off. As he jerked his burnt fingers back, his elbow caught his coffee cup and emptied it into his lap. In the process the newspaper tore again; he screwed it into a ball and used it for mopping-up operations.

He had to change his pants, and so he was late for work—and at Boulter & Schwartz Inc., Radio and Television Engineers, the shop manager told him so, at some length.

This was all just the beginning.

When he started to get down to work, things really got into their stride. He blew two 15-inch cathode ray tubes in the first half-hour. His electric soldering iron short-circuited and blew half the fuses in the factory. He hit a nail with his hammer, only it was his thumb nail, and not the 3-inch nail he was holding. It went on like that—all day.

In the late afternoon, when he was called to the boss's office for the fourth time, Mr. Schwartz said: "Now, look here, Gray, if I have you on the carpet many more times you'll wear a hole in it. What's the matter—are you taking a course in sabotage?"

"If I am, I'm doing a pretty good job on myself," said George grimly. "I have twenty-three broken ribs, by my count, two burnt fingers, a smashed thumb, three cuts from broken glass, and a headache."

"Well, Gray, I think you'd better go home before I have a mutilated corpse on my hands, to say nothing of a demolished factory. It's not your lucky day, nor mine, either, I'm beginning to think."

"I've had it happen before," said George. "Never quite so bad as this, but days when every darned thing goes wrong. I know the signs—I've got a big fat jinx on my tail."

"Well, get him out of here. And don't come back until you've shaken him off."

"Very good, Mr. Schwartz."

So George took off his overalls, and had a wash (only scalding himself slightly) and went straight across the street to a bar. It was a close, stifling day, and he helped himself liberally to the ice. He wasn't backward with the beer, either.

There was only one other customer in the bar, a small, thin, and very worried-looking old man. He was wearing a heavy, black, double-breasted jacket and the sweat was rolling down his shrunken cheeks. Continually, he removed his spectacles and wiped the moisture of humidity from the lenses. When he wasn't doing that, he was taking out what appeared to be a large, turnip pocket-watch and studying it anxiously. In between times he managed to sip at his tall glass of lager.

The bartender was one of those taciturn people who looked upon customers merely as interruptions in his study of the sports columns, and so George, who felt he had to speak to someone, as he'd made himself so unpopular during the day at the factory that no one would address him kindly, caught the old man's eye and remarked "Hot," reflecting that this remark wasn't so.

"Yes, it certainly is, Mr. Gray," said the old man, mildly.

"Oh, you know me? I'm afraid I can't quite place you. Are you connected with Boulter & Schwartz?"

"Oh no. I work for Nuisances Xenogenous."

"Come again?"

"Nuisances Xenogenous. 'Xenogenous' means 'produced by external agency'."

"You mean, you're an agent?"

"In a sense, yes."

"For 'Nuisances'? What's that: itching powder, rubber spiders, squeaking cushions, and so forth?"

"We—ell, something like that. Here's my card."

George took it and read:

JONAH HOODOO

Junior in Nuisances Xenogenous

He frowned, and turned it over, and on the back was written, in a shaky hand:

When you—Have 'flu—You're blue.

"Oh, ignore that," said Mr. Hoodoo, hastily. "It's not one of my better efforts."

"Your own composition?"

"Yes, but——"

"I think it's swell," said George. "May I keep it?" It would be something to show his friends at Boulter & Schwartz for a laugh, when he had friends there again and when they felt like laughing.

"Sure. I realise, of course, that I've a long way to go yet before I'm as good as—say, Keats. I have to admit that at the moment he's the better man. But I keep trying, though, and one day—just a moment."

He produced another card, laid it face downward on the bar, and wrote something on the back with a leaky fountain pen. He showed the result, modestly, to George.

John Keats—Always beats—My feats.

There was a blot after "feats".

"An admirable impromptu performance," said George. "It's quite as good as the other. It merits a drink. Another lager?"

"Thanks. You know, I was really cut out to be a poet. My head's full of rhymes. I find it hard to concentrate on anything else. I guess that's why I've never really got on in this Nuisances Xenogenous line. Do you know, I'm the oldest Junior in the business?"

"Really?"

"Sometimes I think I'll never become a Senior Technician. I'm not getting any younger. And my eyesight's getting bad, real bad. And my PK isn't what it used to be. I never used to worry, but now I find I'm doing it all the time. It's playing the devil with my genius—er, my little versifying talent, that is."

He took out his pocket-watch, on its chain, and regarded it anxiously.

George had reached to pour another lager for the old man, and as he brought his arm back he knocked over his own glass. Beer ran all over the counter.

"Tut-tut," said the old man, without looking up.

"Don't worry," said George. "I've been doing that sort of thing all day. There's a jinx on me or a hoodoo—hey!"

He stopped, and pulled out Mr. Hoodoo's card and stared at it.

"Then I did see right," he said, slowly. "Jonah Hoodoo. Junior In Nuisances Xenogenous. J.I.N.X. You're the jinx!"

Mr. Hoodoo was still peering at his watch. "That's right," he said, vaguely, and continued to peer.

"What do you keep taking that thing out for?" asked George, irritably. "Have you got to catch a train?"

"No, Mr. Gray, there's something wrong with it, I think. Or it may be my eyes. Or——" He looked up suddenly at George. "This is what I've been waiting here to ask you. Are you twins?"

"Eh?" George was startled.

"Have you a twin brother?"

"No. Why? Do I look like him?"

"Yes. That is, if you *had* a twin brother, which you say you haven't . . . Mr. Gray, what you just said doesn't make sense." The old man's voice became querulous.

George said: "Well, that's news. You haven't said anything that made sense from the moment I first clapped eyes on you."

"It's quite simple. I'm a professional jinx. I've been working on your behalf all day."

"On my behalf!" echoed George, but throwing in a little yelp. "Barkeep—two beers. Both for me."

"In return," said Jonah Hoodoo, "I want to ask you for a small favour."

"Sure, anything. I'll break my neck for you—I've nearly done it once to-day already."

"You're a television engineer. I'd like you to check up on my set—the reception seems most unsatisfactory. Or it might be my wretched sight—I don't know. Here, look."

He held out his pocket-watch. Only it wasn't a pocket-watch. The bulbous glass of it was a small, bright television screen, with the black and white image faintly flickering.

George's technical interest submerged his grievances. "My, that's cute. A miniature portable. I've never seen one of those." He reached for it.

"You can't take it off the chain," the old man warned. "The current comes along that. It's hooked up on to a circuit in the lining of my jacket."

George peered at the bright disc. "H'm—something wrong. It's developed a double image."

"Oh, it is the set, after all. I'm glad. I was afraid my eyes were petering out altogether and I was getting double vision."

"What programme is this?" asked George. "No sound—only vision? All I can see is a guy sitting on a stool looking at something in his hand. There's another guy beside him, but he's cut off. The set seems to be a bar—it's *me*!"

The last word came out as a squeak of surprise.



"Naturally," said Mr. Hoodoo. "You're my charge to-day, and I've had to keep you under observation so that I could see where to help you. It's the normal jinx procedure—all jinxes have these sets. Only because you came out double I've been thinking you were twins. So I've had to work twice as hard to keep you both amused. Actually, of course, there's only one of you, so you've had two helpings."

"Yeah," said George. "It dawned on me that I'd run into double trouble. Now, before I ram this little gadget down your gullet, just tell me this. Why pick on me? What had I ever done to you?"

Mr. Hoodoo looked injured. When he spoke, he also sounded injured. "You misunderstand the function of jinxes altogether. It's a high and noble calling. Our job is to keep you interested in life, to save you from appalling boredom. We have the same high intention as fleas on a dog. The dog would degenerate into a lazy, lifeless and aimless creature without his fleas: they supply the *quo animo*, they give the dog *purpose*. With them he is never at a loss for an occupation. In the same way, we are the necessary irritant, the spice in your life——"

"You're the cream in my coffee, eh?" grunted George. "Well, I'd be a sight happier without you."

"Oh no you wouldn't. That's a delusion. In a perfect world, where

everything went right, just as you'd planned it, you'd be bored sick. You'd long for something to go wrong for a change. Perfection is something to be avoided—the old Greek sculptors knew that. That's why, if they produced what they thought was a perfect piece of sculpture, they'd deliberately make a flaw in it, mar it, just a little. They knew that once they'd achieved perfection they'd be at the end of their tether: there would be nothing left to try for in life."

Mr. Hoodoo was really in earnest. He mopped his brow, and wiped his glasses again, and peered at George to see if he had mollified him. But George was still fascinated by the little TV set. He asked: "How is it powered?"

"I have a battery in each jacket pocket. There's an antenna in my hat. The circuit, as I've said, is in my coat lining."

"I wondered why you were keeping your coat on, on a sweltering day like this. I get it now."

Mr. Hoodoo sighed. "Yes, it's one of the burdens of our profession. You can always spot a jinx by that occupational sign, I'm afraid. Any time you see a poor guy sweating in a heavy coat in midsummer, he's almost sure to be a jinx."

"How many jinxes are there around?"

"I'm not allowed to say. But quite a lot, I can tell you that."

"Where's the TV camera? How does it keep focused on me wherever I am?"

"Mr. Gray, you're approaching forbidden territory. In the articles I signed as an apprentice, it expressly stated that no trade secrets must be divulged."

"Forbidden territory—I like that!" exploded George, and then lowered his voice as the bartender looked up from his newspaper. "My bathroom's forbidden territory too—how dare you spy on my private life like that! It was you who made me take that tumble this morning?"

"Yes, Mr. Gray."

"What I want to know is, how could you make me tread plumb on that soap?"

"Soap?" echoed Mr. Hoodoo, vaguely, and stared into space.

"Yeah——"

"Shush," said the old man, raising a finger. "Don't interrupt—I'm inspired." His hand dived suddenly for his fountain pen, while the other hand fumbled for a card.

Carefully, he wrote down:

Why grope—For soap,—You dope?

"There," he said, self-approval spreading over his face, "I do believe that's my masterpiece. Like it?"

George began deliberately, "I think it——"

"If you say you like it," said Mr. Hoodoo hurriedly, "I'll tell you about the soap."

"I was going to say I think it is perfect," said George, which wasn't what he was going to say at all. "Let's have some more beer." He ordered.

"Not quite perfect," said Mr. Hoodoo, looking gratified just the same. "I *could* make it perfect, with a little polishing. But, there, that's just the thing we have to avoid." He studied his masterpiece.

"The soap," reminded George.

"Oh, yes. Well, there's nothing to it, really. Merely psycho-kinesis—the PK effect, as Dr. Rhine prefers to call it. Mind over matter. All jinxes have very highly developed PK centres: it's a necessary qualification for the job. I just have to look at the television screen and concentrate, and I can move any object I see in it. Distance makes no difference, as Dr. Rhine has shown. Of course, it takes a lot of mental energy. I can cause only small effects, like moving the soap to the spot just under your foot, or sliding a cup of coffee along a few inches so that your elbow will encounter it——"

"I ought to charge you for the dry-cleaning of my pants," said George. "I suppose you made me knock over that glass of beer here, too?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid my PK isn't what it was. I didn't move the beer to quite the right place: it should have gone all over you instead of over the counter."

"If you've got any more ideas like that, you'd better forget 'em."

The old man took a pull at his lager.

"Let us say," he said, wiping his mouth, "that I shan't worry you any more if you'll promise to repair my TV set."

George considered. "O.K., in that event I'll promise to try to repair it. I don't know if I can until I've examined it properly. And I'd have to work on it in my private workshop at home."

"Let's go," said Mr. Hoodoo, getting off his stool.

"Not yet. I've not finished my little jag. I planned to get steamed up somewhat, and I'm going to. Now, let's get down to some quiet, steady drinking."

Some time later George looked bleakly along the line of empty bottles between him and Mr. Hoodoo, and saw that his companion had fallen asleep on his stool, his glasses pushed up on his forehead. There was a half-full glass of lager in front of him. George reached out, very carefully, and tipped it over.

Mr. Hoodoo awoke with a start: "Ooh!" Dazedly, he felt the wet bottoms of his pants. He put one foot on the floor—it squelched in his shoe.

"Dear me. I musht have trodden in a puddle. How long's it been raining?"

"Hours," said George, turning his glassy gaze back to the bottles. He counted slowly and with difficulty up to ten. "That's ten dead men. Not bad. That's 'nough. Let's go now."

"Jus' minute. Inshpiration."

Mr. Hoodoo struggled with his pen and a card. He handed the result to George. "Howzzat?"

It was almost illegibly written. George stared at it, but his eyes wouldn't focus properly, and it was doubtful whether he could have read it even if it had been printed in letters a foot high.

"S'fine," he said, handing it back. "You're geniush."

"But you didn't read it out," protested Jonah. He did:

"That'sh ten—Dead men.—Little hen."

"Better'n Shakespeare, Jonah—don't mind if I call you Jonah?" George, laughed foolishly, slid from his stool, and flung his arm about Jonah's shoulders. They staggered out of the bar into the suffocating evening.

"Y'know," said George, "one thing's been worrying me. Shpying on me in b-bathroom. T'ain't right . . . Are there any—any lady jinxes?"

"Lotsh. Oh, lotsh," said Jonah, solemnly.

George said again: "T'ain't right, y'know."

"S'all right—no need to worry. Lady jinxes only have charge—ladies. Men jinxes only have charge—gen'l'men."

"But I don't wanna be *anybody's* charge," expostulated George. "T'ain't right. Who's your bosh? I wanna have a talk with your bosh—have thish sort of thing shtopped. Who's the bosh of all the jinxes?"

Jonah leant confidentially towards him, hanging on him, so that they both stopped in the middle of the pavement, swaying. He put a finger to his lips and whispered: "It's the High Jinx. Don't tell anyone. He's a very shpiteful old man, and he doesn't like me. He's shtopped my promotion all these years. Says I'm not good enough to be a Junior, let alone anything better. And I sho want to be—to be a Shtinx."

"A what?" said George, as they began lurching on again.

"A Shenior Technician In Nuisances Xenogenous. A full-blown Shtinx."

"And he's shtopped you? He's a dirty——"

"Shush," said Jonah. "Don't shay it. He might be watching ush right now. He's alwaysh checking up on how we jinxes go about our job. Dear me, I'd *never* get to be a Shtinx if he knew we were calling him names. I'm shupposed to be looking after you."

George looked slowly back over his shoulder. He gripped Jonah's arm.

"Look! I think shomebody's following ush."

Jonah peered round, swaying.

"I can't shee anybody," he said, turning. He tripped over George's foot, which wasn't where it should be, and went full length into the gutter. It was a very dirty gutter, at that point. George helped him up. There was garbage smeared all down the front of him.

"Where's my glashes?" said Jonah, feeling his forehead, where they were not. "I musht have my glashes—I can't shee without them."

"Here they are," said George, treading on them. "Oh, look, you've trodden on them! They're broken."

"Oh dear," moaned Jonah. "I feel ill." Abruptly, he *was* ill—in the gutter.

"Oh dear," he said again, afterwards. "What's happened to me?"

"It'sh all right, Jonah, my apartment's only just over the way. Come on, I'll shee you there."

George helped Jonah along.

"Everything'sh going wrong," grumbled the old man. "My TV shet won't work, I tread in a puddle and shoak my shock——"

"Huh?" grunted George.

"Shoak my shock. Then I fall in a gutter and shpoil my coat, and break my glashes, and then I'm shick all over the place . . ."

"It'sh shimple enough," said George. "You've got a jinx on your tail. A big, fat jinx. You're a jinx with a jinx."

He began to chuckle. It seemed immensely funny that he was the jinx's jinx now. He was still chuckling when they stumbled into his apartment. After that, he didn't remember anything much.

He awoke long after breakfast time. He was lying on the divan, fully clothed, but very crumpled. A thin little old man in his shirt-sleeves was brushing away at a black coat on a hanger. George frowned. Then he recollected Jonah Hoodoo.

He said: "How now, brown cow? Had chow?"

Jonah looked across at him. "Say, that's pretty good. Mind if I make a note of that one?"

"Help yourself," said George, and the old man wrote it down.

It turned out that Jonah hadn't eaten, so George cooked up something between breakfast and lunch. "I'm *really* late for work to-day," he said, as he served it.

Jonah regarded his face anxiously. "You're not going to work to-day? You were going to fix my video—remember? I must have it in going order as soon as possible."

"That's right," said George. "And you were going to leave me alone. That was the deal, wasn't it?"

Jonah nodded.

"Okay, I'll phone the works and tell 'em I won't be in to-day. After what happened there yesterday, they'll probably be relieved."

He phoned, and they were relieved. The shop manager said they were still clearing up the debris. George wasn't to come near the place until he had shaken off his jinx.

"It's all under control," George assured him. "I'm working on that right now."

Jonah said: "My poor head! Have you got any more aspirins?"

George found him some, and then the old man began grumbling about his broken spectacles and then about the condition of his coat, and then he borrowed some petrol to remove some of the stains which the brushing hadn't. As he dabbed and rubbed, with his nose almost touching the cloth as he peered short-sightedly at it, he mumbled: "I must be in bad with the High Jinx, or he wouldn't have set another jinx on me like that. Wonder what I've done wrong? Guess it must be dereliction of duty. I shouldn't have let you off for the rest of the day. I'll have to work twice as hard to-day to make up for it."

"Huh?" said George. "What's that? You said you wouldn't worry me any more if I promised to repair your set."

"I meant I wouldn't worry you any more *to-day*—which was yesterday, of course," said Jonah, glibly. "I couldn't do more than that—why, I've been assigned to you for the rest of this week. And it's obvious that the High Jinx doesn't approve of my non-attention to duty yesterday evening. I must get into his good graces again, or I'll never become a Stinx."

"I can think of six rude answers to that one," said George, bitterly, "but I shan't waste the time. Get out of here. Come on—get."

"Mr. Gray—your promise!" said Jonah, shocked. "I must have my video fixed, or I can't work again."

"Exactly. Get."

"Mr. Gray, you must understand that my work is for your own good. It is to protect you from your sinful pride. Over-riding pride leads always to disaster. Remember Niobe—she was too proud of her children, and they

were all slain because of that pride. You wouldn't want that to happen to you? A little humility is good for the soul. I am thinking of your soul, Mr. Gray."

"That wasn't your story yesterday," said George, grimly. "Do you have a different spiel for each day of the week? As I see it, you're a paid hireling of a half-wit who gets a kick out of making a monkey out of decent folk."

"Half-wit?" repeated Jonah, distressed. "Oh, my dear Mr. Gray, do be careful of what you're saying. The High Jinx will——"

"The High Jinx," said George, briefly, "is a ——." It was something much less respectable than a half-wit. Jonah collapsed into a jelly of quivering apprehension.

"Oh, Mr. Gray——"

"For the last time—get going!"

Jonah held out his TV set. "Your promise," he said, pathetically. "It's unlucky to break a promise."

George glared at him speechlessly. Then an idea percolated into his angry mind. With an effort he sat on the volcano which was trying to erupt within him, and said, very nearly calmly: "All right, give it to me. I'll fix it. We don't want to be unlucky, do we?"

He took the set into his workshop, and shut the door on Jonah.

He emerged half an hour later, with the little set in his hand, and without a word fastened it back on to Jonah's watch-chain. Jonah peered at the screen showing the small bright image of George's living room and the man in it.

"Wish I had my glasses," he muttered. "It's going to be very difficult until I can get a new pair. Still, I can see you've rectified the double image fault. Thank you very much. I hope you will have no hard feelings about my work in future."

"I wish you luck," said George, elliptically.

"Thank you, indeed. You're a nice fellow, really. It'll be a pleasure to work for you. Now, just one last small request before I go. Could you give me the address of a good optician? I must order some new spectacles."

George gave him an address. It was the address of a mortician on the far side of the town.

"Thank you," said Jonah. "I shall tell him you advised me to go to him as a customer. Well, good-bye now. I can't wish you good luck, being what I am,"—he laughed nervously—"but remember it's all for the best in the long run. I shall be thinking of you."

"And I shall be thinking of you," George assured him. "Good-bye."

Jonah couldn't see the stairs very well, and when he stepped off the bottom one he found it wasn't the bottom one. He picked himself up, gingerly felt the tooth-marks in his tongue, and blundered out of the door. He turned right and put his foot down a drain.

"Dear me," he muttered, extricating it, and peering covertly up and down the street. There were a number of people about, and as it was a damp morning they were all wearing raincoats. Any one of them might have been the jinx that was still, obviously, persecuting him on the orders of the High Jinx. He felt like a sheep that had strayed being nipped back into the flock by the sheepdog.

He went along the block and around the corner, out of sight from George's

apartment. It was plain that he must get back on duty at once.

He pulled out his video and studied it. The image was still single—he could make that out—but the detail was blurred: that was his bad sight, of course.

Odd, he thought—Mr. Gray must have left the apartment directly after him, for he was now standing in a street. He was holding something in his hand and looking at it: an object that gleamed—probably his cigarette case. Here was a chance—Jonah visualised George having to pick up all his cigarettes from the damp ground, for the good of his soul. He summoned his PK reserves and willed the object to slip out of the victim's hand and fall to the sidewalk.

At which moment his TV set slipped from his own fingers, slipped right off the hook of the chain, and smashed into pieces on the wet sidewalk. Little springs and screws, pivots and wheels, coils and microscopic tubes danced a brief ballet, and then lay still around the bright splinters of the small convex mirror George had fitted in place of the screen.

Jonah regarded the debris in dismay. No good asking Mr. Gray to repair *that* !

Fancy a jinx doing a thing like this to him ! It was outrageous. It must be a renegade jinx, someone outside the union.

But he knew, really, that there were no renegade jinxes. What had been done to him must have been done at the direction of the inscrutable High Jinx. So drastic an act could symbolise only one thing: he was washed up, finished. So far from the High Jinx endorsing his promotion to a Stinx, he had underlined his oft-expressed opinion that Jonah Hoodoo wasn't even good enough to be a Junior.

But inspiration calls upon geniuses even in the midst of their greatest tragedies. Perhaps it is at such times that the call sounds clearest. Jonah Hoodoo heard the call and pulled out his pen and pinned down inspiration in mid-flight.

That sphinx,—High Jinx,—Sure thinks—This gink's—No Stinx.

He regarded the crowded back of the card with great satisfaction. He had been cramping his genius in the confines of the triplet form. It needed five lines, at least, to express itself. Perhaps, one day, he might even write an ode !

It had to be admitted: he was a poet, and nothing else. To think of the years he had wasted as a jinx !

"I resign," he said aloud, and felt the burden fall from him.

He was old, but it was never too late. Titian painted *The Battle of Lepanto* when he was ninety-eight. Goethe was over eighty when he wrote the second part of *Faust*. There was plenty of time. Jonah Hoodoo marched down the street triumphantly towards his new life.

On the way he fell over an ashcan. But that sort of thing didn't matter any more—not to a genius. Indeed, it was ennobling.

THE END

DOUBLE TROUBLE

THEN THERE WERE TWO

By J. T. M'INTOSH

A matter transmitter would be the solution for the perfect crime—it could also supply the perfect solution for the police.

Illustrated by HUNTER

"Coming in for a drink, Tom?" Georgette asked.

He shook his head. "Thanks—but I've a date at the Moonpool, and just time to make it," he said.

She nodded brightly. She didn't care. To her he was just a good doubles partner. That was why he had spent the afternoon with her—her evidence would be clear and transparently honest.

He forced himself not to hurry as he walked to the transmission centre. There must be nothing out of the ordinary that would require explanation—why he hurried, why he had been slow, why no one had seen him, why he had made himself conspicuous. He didn't even allow himself to dwell unduly on the pleasure it would be to kill Burden. He could take that when it came.

He pushed the swing door aside and grinned at Ethel, who had risen as she heard his steps and sat down when she saw who it was. "You needn't show me around, Ethel," he said. "If I don't know my way about, who does?"

He was a TC employee. In the morning he sat where Ethel was sitting, sold tickets to the Moon, to Mars and to Venus, showed travellers to the cubicles and pressed the buttons for them. She nodded and was immersed in her magazine again before he had taken three steps from the desk, one of twenty in a huge circle with the cubicles in the middle. Even then, however, she probably noticed that instead of doing anything unusual he went into the nearest empty cubicle, and that the whine of the motors started almost as soon as he had closed the door.

Thousands of people travelled between Earth, the Moon, Mars and Venus every day. But only one ship had ever made each long, hazardous journey. Matter transmission was much better, quicker and safer than actual travel. You stood in a cubicle, an inquisitive beam analysed you to the last atom and sent your whole specification, down to the motes of dust on coins in your pocket, on a carrier beam to your destination. There a receiver duplicated you. You didn't actually move an inch: the machine on Earth dissolved you into atoms and swept you away, but not until you were complete and in good running order at your destination.

The designers had been very careful that people arrived only in one place, and that there was nothing left at the transmitting centre except useful, but disorganised atoms. Otherwise a lot of smart people would get rich very quickly by duplicating money and jewels and other valuables, and some of them might even devote their agile minds to the advantages of being



in two places at the same time. It needed a genius to solve the problem of outwitting the machines, and no geniuses were ever given the chance. It wasn't publicised, but TC employees were never very bright. No one with an IQ of over 130 was ever allowed near the machines—except the technicians, who had a maximum of two years' service and were watched, before and after, like known spies.

Tom Cargill hated Burden so much that he had turned himself into a genius. At that, he knew the psychologists had made a big mistake. Few people knew that TC employees had to be dumb—but Cargill had the brains to work it out for himself. So he had bucked the psychologists and beaten them. By taking just a little longer than he need have done, by looking stolidly for difficulties where he had known there were none, and by making sure he was right before he opened his mouth, he had achieved responses that rated him 118. He had succeeded, he knew, chiefly because no one believed it could be done.

So as he sank into the coma that was so like sleep he knew two beams

THEN THERE WERE TWO

were carrying his specification to the Moonpool and to Dessburg, Mars. At the same instant, in forty-five minutes' time, he would wake at both places. So he knew he could murder Burden and get away with it.

He had already accounted for the loss of power. It had been an unexplained item at the London C depot for two months now. No one would ever miss something that had been lost for two months. Moreover, the transmitter he used was so wired that after being used once for the double transmission it would burn itself out, quite naturally, as transmitters often did, and no one would think anything of it. Even if they did, they could prove nothing.

Cargill awakened on Mars. He knew that without moving, for there was a little plate on the inside of the cubicle doors. He looked at his watch. Forty-five minutes, exactly as usual. It differed for different people—height, weight, sex, age, dress and a dozen other factors contributed. But for him it was always around forty-five minutes.

The next step was to leave the Dessburg TC unseen, or at least unidentified. That was easy. Scores of people were returning home from Venus and Earth. He kept where the crowds were thickest, and knew, when he got outside, that the chances were a thousand to one against anyone having consciously noticed him.

There was just one more thing. He had to know it had worked. He stopped at the first phone box—an automatic one. He wanted no record of this call. There was no delay. Cargill II was waiting at the Moonpool TC for the call. And in a few seconds Cargill was talking to himself . . .

He left the phone box and strolled in the busy Dessburg streets. It was exactly like an Earth city except for the huge dome overhead. The people were exactly like Earth people. It was impossible to tell which of them had been born on Mars and which had come from Earth or Venus. He stopped at the pitiful little park kept alive by artificial sunlight. The grass was soft and green, but it would die in a wind or a rainstorm. The flowers stood up bravely, but if you plucked one it drooped before you could put it in water.

He sat on a park bench and smoked a cigarette. He was in no hurry. He had to give Cargill II time to establish a rock-solid alibi at the Moonpool. Transmission from anywhere in the civilised world to anywhere else in forty minutes meant that alibis often weren't as good as they had once been. But it did need forty minutes. If Cargill II obviously hadn't had at least forty minutes to reach Mars and forty minutes to get back, he couldn't be Burden's murderer.

But Cargill I, having an hour to wait, got to thinking. The plan was that he should kill Burden and then himself, throwing himself into the black, man-made waterway that writhed through Dessburg. He died, but what did it matter? He lived on at the Moonpool. One Cargill would be dead, but that was part of the plan. When they fished him from the canal, if they ever did, it would be unlikely that they could identify him. Even if they did, they couldn't touch the other Cargill. The beauty of the plan was that the Cargill who was left would not only have an unshakable alibi. He would be actually innocent of murder.

That was all very well, thought Cargill, but if he killed himself he would be extremely dead. What was it to him—the Cargill who sat on a bench

and smoked a cigarette—that somewhere else someone exactly like him was still alive? No, there was another way. He would kill Burden and let Cargill II build up his alibi—but then he would return and dispose neatly of Cargill II. The alibi would still stand. He would use it instead of his twin, that was all.

He liked the story better told that way. He went over it in his mind to make sure there were no flaws in it. He could see none. If he didn't get away, it was too bad. The plan worked as arranged, with Cargill II puzzled, unable to explain his double, and not really very interested.

But if he *could* get away . . .

It was time to see Burden. Cargill was unarmed. That couldn't be helped. He knew he couldn't get a gun on Mars in a hurry, and if he had taken one from Earth it would have involved both twins.

Burden himself opened the door. A wave of hate swept over Cargill, almost making him sick. You could hate with your whole body. "Ah, Tom," said Burden softly. "What a pity Margaret isn't here. Come in and have a drink anyway."

"She isn't here?"

"Don't let it worry you. I'm always glad to see you."

Cargill followed him inside and accepted a glass of sherry. He didn't hate Burden because he loved Burden's wife—he hated him because Burden had been able to take Margaret from him. He knew in a vague way that the situation had been played over and over again, a million times a generation, since men had developed property rights and all that went with them. He didn't hate, say, Bill Williamson, who had married another girl he used to think he loved. It just happened, through environment or fate, that the dearest wish of his life was to see Burden dead. And now he hadn't long to wait.

It was pleasant to edge Burden into the mood in which he was easiest to hate, and then stop his mouth for ever. Burden was talking about Margaret, cynically and coarsely, as man to man, when Cargill struck him on the side of the head with a heavy clock and as he lay dazed took him by the throat.

It didn't take long. He rose swiftly. Now he had to get clear.

The door of the lounge opened, and Margaret, wearing a kimono, came in. For an instant he froze. She had been in the house all the time, but how could he have known Burden was lying?

She saw the thing on the floor and screamed. Cargill couldn't kill her as he had killed Burden. Part of his plan was to get her back. But he had to silence her. He caught her round the mouth so that she couldn't bite him, couldn't scream. She fought, but she wasn't strong. He didn't hurt her more than he had to. But all the time he held her so that she couldn't see his face. She had only caught a glimpse of him, and though she had certainly recognised him, she could hardly be sure when faced with his alibi. —

He tied her hands and ankles with curtain cord and gagged her with a strip torn from her own wrap. That done, he went out into the hall, stopped to straighten his clothes and make sure he looked normal. Then he opened the door.

Two policemen grabbed his arms. Two more were getting out of a car drawn up at the kerb.

"What . . ." he shouted. He fought. It was no use.

THEN THERE WERE TWO

"All right, let's take a look inside," said one of the men.

He tried to break free, but they hardly seemed to notice it. They dragged him back into the house like a small boy who refuses to go to bed . . .

They put him in a cell at Dessburg police station. They didn't question him, didn't take a statement from him. Margaret had positively identified him as Tom Cargill. They told him they were waiting for Inspector Morrel from London—and that was all they told him.

In his cell Cargill tried to be philosophical. After all, the original plan had entailed his death. He couldn't have been much more unlucky—unless, perhaps, he had failed to kill Burden. But even as it was, what could they do? They might hang him. They probably would. But how could they punish the other Cargill?

He shrugged his shoulders. It was still a perfect plan. He tried to remember the other Cargill was him, as much as he was. They would hang him, or burn him—he didn't know what the system of execution on Mars was—but he had still won. They might work out everything, but they still couldn't hang a man who was obviously innocent of any crime.

There was someone at the cell door. Keys rattled and two men came in. One was the local police chief. The other introduced himself as Inspector Morrel. He was a little chubby man with a blue chin, his expression indicating that life was one big joke and he was the only one who saw the point. When he spoke his voice was big and round, like those of so many small men.

"First of all, Cargill," said Morrel briskly, "I may as well tell you we know all about it."

Cargill grinned faintly, genuinely amused at the ingenious trap. You couldn't blame them for trying, though.

"I don't say you weren't clever," Morrel admitted. "The safeguards against this sort of thing are pretty tight—tighter than you guess. You were lucky in one or two ways that you don't even know about. In fact, you came within an ace of getting away with something that was supposed to be impossible."

He looked reprovingly at Cargill, shaking his head like a burglar who punishes his son, not for stealing, but for being caught. "And you had to go and spoil it," Morrel said sadly.

"You're literally a man who would doublecross yourself," he went on. "In fact, you did. You didn't stick to your plan here—did you think you'd do it on the Moon either?"

For the first time apprehension clouded Cargill's mind. If Cargill II hadn't taken his chance to establish the alibi . . .

Morrel stroked a chin that needed shaving, that would always need shaving, absently lit a cigarette and obviously forgot about it.

"Yes, you doublecrossed yourself, Cargill," he said. "You came straight back from the Moon, went to Scotland Yard, and told us all about it. You see, however smart you were here, you couldn't outsmart yourself. And the same applied to the Cargill who came to see us. So you broke your own scheme two ways."

"But why . . ."

"Why did the other Cargill come to us? You should know. He thinks exactly as you do. He said to himself: 'Now if I carry out this plan I may

be safe and I may not. I don't trust that guy—and I should know. But if I go to the police I can make sure they catch my twin and hang him, and I'll be in the clear'."

Morrel paused, remembered his cigarette, which was still hanging from his mouth, and inhaled furiously.

"And technically," he added, "he was right. He was with me when you murdered Burden. I'd have to testify to that myself. He made sure, of course, that he gave you time to kill Burden but not to get away. He judged it nicely, too."

"And you mean—he's going to get away with it?" Cargill demanded.

"Sorry?" asked Morrel.

"No, that's exactly—but . . ." He stopped himself. "I'm not going to say any more. Not that it matters a damn. You know that."

Morrel nodded. "I give you that. Well, let's go."

"Where?"

"Your twin brought us into it by coming to us. It's our case. I'm taking you back to Earth."

Cargill shrugged his shoulders.

He watched, interestedly, the preparations for taking him back. Two policemen got into cubicles and the motors whirled. They would be waiting for him on Earth. Then the others started him on his way, with some of them waiting behind to make sure the process worked as usual. They took no chances.

When he arrived he stepped out of the cubicle, saw the police waiting for him, saw Morrel come out too, saw Ethel stare at him in the handcuffs they had clicked on his wrists back on Mars, and still wasn't perturbed. Then . . .

He swore violently and tried to tear loose. Morrel shook his head mildly.

"You never had a chance, Cargill," he said almost sympathetically. "Once you let us in on it we were 'way ahead of you. And even if you'd guessed it wouldn't have helped you."

Fear crawled in Cargill's stomach. He had seen nothing; it was in himself that he felt his doom. For he was one again. The man who stood there had killed Burden, and had gone to the police. He had been on Mars and on the Moon. The two who had worked against each other were together in one body, one mind.

It was obvious how they had done it. He knew both halves of the story now. They had taken his twin back to the Moon, apparently to check his story, and synchronised his return from the Moon and from Mars—to one receiver.

"I think we'll just forget your alibi," said Morrel generously. "We can prove you killed Burden. You can say at your trial you were in my office at Scotland Yard too. It won't do you a bit of good."

He smiled happily. "Glad we got you together again," he said. "There's much more point in hanging you now. It's almost"—he grinned more broadly—"like killing two birds with one stone, isn't it?"

Cargill went wild. Morrel only went on shaking his head reprovingly.

THE END

THEN THERE WERE TWO

THE MOVING HILLS

By E. R. JAMES

Life on other worlds may be just as complicated by machinery as Earth—more so, in fact. Maybe the machines will have final control.

Illustrated by HUNTER

Discovered by some obscure character with the name of Siemens, the Deserted Planet caught the imagination of all manner of men. Throughout the Galaxy, for the perverse reason of attempted suppression by authority, the news spread.

Space ships set courses for it, like iron filings suddenly affected by the fields of an electro-magnet. One such ship, *The Chesterfield*, half wrecked by an explosion in her overloaded, old engines, turned aside for repairs on Space Station 7083. There, the captain, a grim, not over-scrupulous man, made desperately short of crew-members, spilled the beans.

And so it happened that a certain mercantile space mechanic, Marmaduke Fleming Brockhurst—"Brocky" to his friends, for obvious reasons—leapt clear up into his shared quarters and grabbed his mate by the shoulders.

"We're rich!"

But to Colin Ruskin, who remembered how Brocky had lured him out into the loneliness of space, the Captain's offer did not sound so good.

"Huh-uh. So he pays us twice what we're getting here. What of it? Here we get three times the wages we had on Earth—and we have to pay four times as much for smokes—and we've got to stay the full period of our benighted contract because we can't save enough to resign and pay the fare back, and——"

"That's just it!" Brocky waved his arms eloquently. "We get paid to be taken off——"

"And go deeper into Space——"

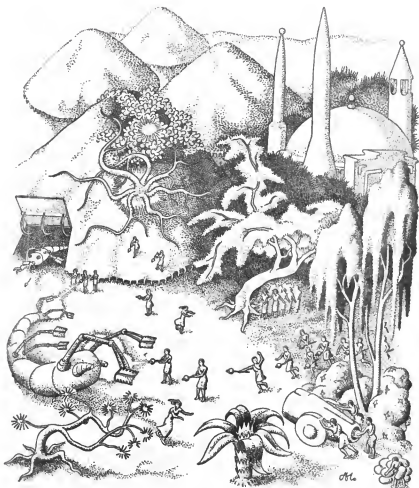
"But think of the opportunity! A planet complete with cities—but with no population— Think of the loot just waiting to be picked up!"

"Huh!" Colin reached for his cigarette case, but Brocky grabbed it.

"You listen to me. We're going, Colin. I'm not missing this because you're content to emulate a primæval lichen——"

Colin sighed. He knew from experience that it was no good to point out probable snags. The evidently humanoid population of the planet might have killed each other off and left hidden danger as one rumour had suggested; but Brocky would say that was just propaganda to keep away the chicken-hearted. Authority was there in strength by now, of course; but Brocky would say that a planet was a big place. Yes, Brocky would have an answer for everything. "I'm not going," he said. "And that's final."

Brocky cocked a bushy eyebrow at him, and argued, unabashed, at great length with great plausibility, variety, and much waving of hands. "Oh,



very well," he ended gruffly. "I suppose you'll at least have the decency to see me off."

"Sure. Don't be nasty, Brocky. You know I'd come like a shot if it wasn't for Marylin. Another year here is as much as I dare risk away from her . . ."

"O!" Brocky rounded his lips. "So that's it." He smiled to himself. "Well, I suppose I can't blame you."

Ten minutes later, waving his clearance papers to the grim captain, he stalked up the gangway of *The Chesterfield*, Colin paused regretfully behind him. The prospect of the Space Station without the ebullient Brocky was nearly as bad as the deserts of Siemens's Planet.

"Come on up!" Brocky grinned down. "Help me christen my new quarters over a bottle. There's plenty of time . . ."

Colin edged up hesitantly. Brocky seized his arm and, full of enthusiasm for the big but outdated ship, gossiped and laughed over antiquated machines. "Just look at that lifeboat gear, Colin. A switch for every operation. Maybe this is the original "Ark" under another name . . ."

In the mechanics' quarters, Brocky swung his kitbag on to one of the two bunks, reached down two glasses, and sat on the other bunk. "I've just thought. I've packed my flask at the bottom . . ."

"All right." Colin, grinning, surrendered the flask from his own hip-pocket.

"To adventure!" said Brocky.

Colin frowned. "Don't rub it in."

About to drink, he hesitated. The floor seemed to shift uneasily beneath his feet. "What's that?"

"Eh?" Brocky stifled a yawn. "Oh, they'll be getting ready to drift clear."

"Then I'd better be going— Ah!"

Brocky thrust out at him, knocking him back sprawling on the other bunk. As he struggled up, gasping for breath, Brocky roared with laughter, turned and pelted up a connecting ladder.

And, from forward control, the warning hoot of acceleration startled Colin. He held his breath. No. Brocky wouldn't have dared! But—

"You devil!" He sprang after his mate.

Brocky mocked him from the top of the ladder. They reached the acceleration tank just as the second hoot sounded. There was only time to fling themselves on the deep-sprung couches.

They were off. The old ship trembled and shuddered as the thrust mounted. Speech was cut off.

"We're on our way!"

"You—snake—you—"

The space station dwindled to nothing upon the rear-facing screen, and then, suddenly, the ship bucked giddily. Pressure eased. Colin grabbed the edges of the couch and felt sick.

"Mechanics to engines," growled the captain's voice. "We've blown a distributor lead in the turbine chamber, I suspect. Second in command to stores to issue spares. Radio op. report back trivial nature of trouble to Space Station. Crewman No. 1 to secondary switchboard to check astro-gation lights and light out-of-control flare. Crewman No. 2 report to me. Check back orders in order of emergency seniority, as given."

Colin glared at the intercom speaker while Brocky checked. He rose and followed his mate in silence. There was nothing he could do but accept the situation. It would only hinder the repair to argue.

Clad in the stiff protective suits they crawled up through the jungle of the distributor leads and, after a routine examination to get the hang of the workings, they set to work.

"Two bust open," muttered Brocky. "Great Novas, but what an antiquated mess. Wonder how he gets his spares . . ."

"Huh." Well, it was at least child's play after the complexity of the Space Station.

As they worked their way forward again, Colin paused, blocking the way, and looked back. "I suppose you think you're clever, shanghai-ing me like

that. What if I'd left my savings behind—as well as my kit?"

"Fathead! Think I don't know you carry them in a bodybelt? And your kit was taken on board before we left. Most of it, anyway. Go on! Have we got to argue it out here, sweating in these quilts?"

It was impossible to be on bad terms with Brocky for long. Before they landed on Siemens's Planet, Colin had forgotten and forgiven.

The ship set down within landcar distance of a sizeable city. Policemen flew out and impounded the ship in spite of the captain's bluster. Formalities dragged themselves to a close, and Colin and Brocky and the others of the crew were informed brusquely that they would be paid wages as soon as the cargo of Government surplus "Pelican" planetary aircraft had been disposed of. Meanwhile they had indefinite harbour leave, although they were required to report each midday.

"You know what I think," said Colin. "He reckons he's got a couple of good oil-swabbers, and he doesn't mean to lose us. We might as well kiss those wages goodbye."

"Don't be an ass!" Brocky grinned across the arid desert at the shining city. He had already tried stealth and bribery to get past the guard which had, until then, picketed them.

They strolled, full of wonder, down the wide thoroughfares. The moving ways no longer carried anything on the outskirts, but in the centre men moved upon them—as though they had indeed been man-made. Single men occupied lavish apartments. Apart from recent depredations, the City seemed as though everything had simply stopped. But, except for the intruders from the motley fleet all around, nothing lived. "No plants. Not even a dog. Nothing," said Colin soberly.

Brocky found a skeleton half buried in dust. "Humanoid, all right." He scuffed it free, lit a cigarette, and looked around appraisingly. "What a place! They mayn't have had space travel, but it looks as though they'd everything else. And they left it here for us . . ."

"For us? Brocky, you're forgetting this is the frontier." Colin blew smoke into the still, dry air. "Suppose we did get together a cargo of alien machinery, how'd we get it back to civilisation—charter a ship? Or do we stake out a claim and wait ten years for colonists to arrive. If we didn't starve, we'd be baked to death or go mad . . ."

Brocky's eyes twinkled irrepressively.

Colin sighed. "You can be sure this place at any rate has been cleared of all portable valuables—"

"Pelicans!" said Brocky. "How about getting the captain to pay us off in kind?"

"Not me. Cash is what I want. Leave me out if you're thinking of flying off." Colin reminded his mate that Siemens's Planet was of slightly greater mass than Earth. Millions of unmapped square miles of desert. Food of any kind would be worth its weight in gold. And a reconditioned military plane—even a Pelican, which might, admittedly have been designed for the job—was likely to break down and such patrol activity as there was never find them—

"All right! All right!" Brocky wiped sweat from his face. "Forget it. But there's nothing against having a look around, is there?"

Soon, however, the burden of extra gravity and the merciless alien sun drove them into a café of sorts. "Money first," said the proprietor grimly, and they paid twenty times Earth prices for tinned beer, meat and bread.

Even Brocky seemed depressed, but he brightened as a man outside another building called to them. "New here, friends? You can't afford to miss this show, then. Something you'll experience only once in a lifetime. I'm trying to get enough money together to take it back to Earth. Step right in. Continuous performances. Just about to begin."

It was cool in the lofty hall. Seats ringed up to the roof. "Sit down anywhere, friends," said the man.

Colin looked at him suspiciously. There were a few other people scattered through the place. Over the heads of these were heavy helmets, hinged to the back of the seats.

"Sit down," smiled the man. "Just pull on a helmet and relax. See the news of ten years ago—what happened during the last days here."

Brocky grinned. He obeyed while Colin watched. And after a few moments Colin's curiosity got the better of him.

As soon as the helmet settled into place its slightly dusty gloom seemed to quiver with moving light. Then a tingle caught the backbone and seemed to spread out warmly all through the body, clearing the brain.

Colin was no biologist, but he knew enough of the mechanics of the body to realise that some force was acting upon his spinal cord, stimulating his nerves.

He seemed to be watching a verdant land. The hills beyond the City seemed faintly familiar—as though this was a view of the desert around the city in which they were—as it had been before the catastrophe.

But—

In that clump of waving palm foliage close to the fringe of villas, men were moving swiftly, assembling guns of some kind, perhaps—big tubular structures, that blended in an uncanny way with the colour and light and shade.

They were speaking, too. And their voices were extraordinarily melodious, their words—if words they were—like the rustle of leaves, the song of birds and the calls of animals arranged in harmony.

The architecture of the City, behind them, too, seemed to blend with the landscape, its high white walls and towers seemed to show more alien, more graceful and somehow of a calm serenity, as though the stone itself was alive . . . but that was illusion, an effect of art and the nature, perhaps, of the inhabitants.

Somehow it was possible to see the roof of a building or two. There were plants growing in profusion—and yet, were those artistic arrangements of leaves and branches and stems, the work of haphazard nature? were they true plants such as those outside the City?

But now, looking more closely, it was possible to see much more activity. The entire city was ringed with concealed weapons. And there was movement in the hills beyond. The hills themselves shifted.

Tensely the defenders of the City were waiting. Sweat glistened upon their brown, half-naked bodies. And the hills, moving down from the lower slopes, grew larger.

It seemed it was war. As though there had been a declaration of hostilities between two great forces, as though the men who waited knew exactly what to expect and waited the outcome in fear but with fortitude.

And the hills grew closer. Creepers and broken plants trailed around their edges, hiding the method of locomotion, but they came down in ordered array, like troops.

Suddenly a voice trilled like the warning note of a bird. Men sprang to activity, and the clumps of foliage concealing them began to move. Everywhere, as far as the eye could see, trees moved and the rustle of their passage seemed to fill the air of the entire planet.

Miraculously, creepers shot out tendrils from points ahead of the men and the hills slowed in their movement as liana ropes coiled and grew up their slopes. And from the tubular structures missiles flew. Like suddenly exploding seed-pods, scarcely more deadly surely, the missiles burst showering dust.

And the hills slowed again as they became alive with frantic growth, thrusting up through the existing covering, choking it, growing out with the rapidity of green smoke, trailing back and tangling with trees, alive with a vitality quite incredible.

The hills stopped, heaving and shuddering, and the men swarmed up their steep sides, probing and stabbing.

Like fleas upon gigantic, shapeless carcasses, the brown bodies, dwarfed by the comparative immensity of the attackers, climbed and scurried amongst the swarming mass of turbulent undergrowth. The desperation of their movements suggested a fight against time. And the scene was repeated over and over again into the shimmering distance to the cloud-flecked horizon.

And, here and there, men broke through the skins of the hills and called back with their soft voices tinged with triumph. Summoned thus from concealment, women, graceful and sleek as wild things, swarmed out.

As though in alarm, or was it warning? the hills at last gave voice. Harsh, metallic, grating, they screeched. Here and there, men fled ignominiously, many paused, some gathered in groups as though to assist each other.

The hills seemed to redouble their efforts, struggling elephantine in the enmeshing coils of unnatural living matter. Small machines moved out from suddenly opening hatches, slicing through the swathing lianas, attacking men and women mercilessly. But now, some of the hills were still, and humans were leaving these disabled monsters and adding to the fury and chaos of the survivors.

The screeching of the hills reached crescendo. The confusion of the scene, the blood-flecked mass of moving green, the swaying hills, the hand-to-hand conflict seemed to reach climax.

Then, as though at a signal, a black dust began to puff up out of the hills, like nothing so much as a funereal smoke pall, drifting with the breeze, spreading out and sinking slowly towards the ground.

It touched the tangled green mass of creeper and the creeper shrank away. It settled down as men and women stood as though appalled. The greenness of the scene seemed to wither. The sere of autumn colours showed here and there. Then came the blackness and purples and blotchiness of putrescence.

And the air stank.

Humanity stood like images on the silent hills, or gathered in troubled clusters as the machines ceased their slaughter.

All the time the plant death spread. Within minutes there were patches of poisoned earth. The precarious balance of nature had gone, destroyed in a moment. And the patches spread as the humans ran towards their city.

Elderly people hobbled out on to denuded earth to watch. Children wandered bewildered or making signs of battle, mimicking that which had gone before.

The battle was over, it seemed. But the counter-weapon of the hills had not finished. The hills began to retreat over the wetness of decayed foliage. Under their bare, stony sides, you could see myriad legs, moving up and down, like those of many caterpillars, moving them back and back, like living, thinking beings horrified by what had been done.

But the scene began to flicker, and lines of fern-like writing showed neatly where the pictures had been, and darkness followed, and was replaced by scenes of famine, of a search for anything green that might live, and of the eroding desert, and of desolation and despair.

Colin tired of them. Shaken and depressed by this record left by a doomed civilisation, he stared around the lofty hall made by an extinct race and he pondered. The methods of fighting were so different from anything Earthly or remotely Earthly, that a different basis of culture was certain. And yet, the people had been so like himself. And the machines of the hills had been so reminiscent of semi-robotic creations of Earthly cities. He shuddered.

That night they returned to *The Chesterfield*, and slept as usual in their quarters. Early the next morning, Brocky began to pack his bag. "Haven't changed your mind, have you, Colin?"

"You——" Colin stared. "You're not serious about flying off into the blue . . . surely . . ."

"Why not? You've got your girl on Earth; but I've got my plans too. I never meant to be stuck on that Space Station——"

"You didn't? But you said——"

"Oh, don't repeat that. I had to get you to come along some way, didn't I! You old stick-in-the-mud——"

"Why, you devil!" Colin suddenly chuckled. As suddenly, however, he sobered. "Brocky . . ."

"Yep?"

"Suppose we just went on in this ship . . . until we happen upon some planet where there's a real opportunity——"

"No need." Brocky grinned. "To think of all the time we spent on that vest pocket Space Station, when there were worlds just waiting to be conquered . . ."

Colin gave up. Brocky was in a class by himself. Crazy though the vague plan was, he, Colin Ruskin of a long line of sober stay-at-homes, would have gone along, if it hadn't been for Marylin. He said as much.

Brocky tackled the captain who was standing in the enormous main air-lock, looking out at a small crowd of men who stood talking or looking up at him.

"If you wish," said the captain indifferently. "But you're a fool, you

know. All these men are waiting for me to get clearance papers so I can take them off this God-forsaken place."

"So," said Colin rather grimly, "there's no market for your Pelicans?"

"None." The captain's glare challenged him to ask for wages, just to ask. "What of it?"

"Cheer up!" laughed Brocky. "He'll be able to pay you after he's collected off the emigrants."

Colin looked from one to the other.

Brocky seized his hand. "See you sometime." He put one foot on the empty belly-bag of the Pelican nearest the entrance and jumped up to the little cabin.

The captain and Colin backed away and Brocky settled down inside and began to check the controls and standard stores.

He put his head out of the cabin blister top and waved. Colin waved back as the engines whistled and fire spat in a line along the trailing edge of the swept-back wings.

Brocky grinned. "How's your body-belt?" he shouted.

Colin gasped. His hand moved automatically to feel the slight bulge of his roll of Interplanetary Credit Notes. It wasn't there. He started forward after the moving Pelican craft. "Stop!"

"You stop!" snarled the captain, dragging him back. "D'you want to get blasted into the ship?"

Colin gasped as the Pelican zoomed up into the hard blue sky. He caught the captain's arm. "Can you give me one of those blasted things?"

"Help yourself!" The captain roared with laughter.

But he ran to one side as Colin clambered aboard an aircraft a short way down the line. Colin reflected grimly that he'd get Brocky all right. This model was a Mk. IV; Brocky's had been a Mk. III. Difference in acceleration and performance between the two was most marked. Keeping a cool head was what counted.

Turbines screaming, he shot up in pursuit. Brocky seemed in no great hurry, or was it the difference in speeds?

The two-way radio winked. Colin flicked the switch.

"Pelicans!" said a strange voice. "Land at once. You are warned that it is not possible to follow your movements, owing to the limited radar apparatus available. Thus it has been decided for safety and security reasons to ban all unauthorised exploration. Land at once, or guided missiles will be fired after you and your aircraft will almost certainly be damaged in the forced landings."

Brocky's only answer was to increase acceleration. "Come back, you idiot!" called Colin, opening his throttle to maximum. "They'll use limpet harassers. We don't stand a chance."

"Oh, no?" laughed Brocky, and his Pelican dived almost to ground level.

Dust, stirred up by the jet slots of his wings, rose like baffling smoke. Colin switched to automatic radar control.

"You have five seconds to start turning," warned the voice of authority.

Dust clouds swirled around the blister of Colin's cockpit. So fast was he going that the half-seen desert below seemed featureless, like a yellow-grey

ribbon. His plane swayed and rocked as it followed Brocky's unseen evasive action.

Night flying gear automatically came into action. The radar sweep revealed the swelling shape of Brocky's hurtling Pelican. Six other dots showed behind, and grew with frightening rapidity. Although the dust baffled ordinary light, the guided missiles would get some check on their radar with infra-red.

Brocky's voice sounded breathlessly. "We should just make it to the hills."

The swerving of Colin's aircraft grew more violent. Brocky was taking advantage of the mechanical nature of their pursuers. His own actions, being unpredictable, would be magnified by unthinking automats.

Colin resumed partial control. The image of Brocky's Pelican grew dangerously large. Shadows cast by the hills grew darker.

Sunshine glared into the blister of Colin's aircraft as it shot clear of the dust. He glanced at Brocky's sparkling craft, slightly ahead and to the left, and swerved away.

He felt the Pelican lift as automatic safety height was maintained above the foothills. On the radar check he saw the six dots divide, four following him. Random choice, he thought bitterly. Hang Brocky's luck!

Hillocks rushed at him. He forgot everything while winding between them, holding the Pelican as low as the automats would permit. A ravine opened, slid past dizzily as he fought the controls and nursed permitted altitude.

A valley yawned below, was gone. Rock formations of weather-worn grotesquerie leaped at him and he stood the Pelican first on one wing and then the other. Smooth, roughly conical hills of sandstone rose up in irregular tiers towards the snow-capped peaks.

Brocky was either out of radar range, or hidden. Two missiles only still swelled upon the sweep. He twisted around. There they were, rockets glaring red, streaming vapour trails.

Perhaps these two might be lured to a fiery end—— He dived. The Pelican jolted as minimum height was violated. Hills rushed dizzily towards him. Over a little plain, he cut back the throttle and dashed sweat from his eyes. The hills seemed to strike at him like yellowed teeth. Much more of this and his speed of reaction would deteriorate to that of a machine.

In the midst of straining muscles and nerves, it seemed that the hills moved, that the entire view was shifting uneasily. The Pelican grazed a yellow slope, scoring a shower of sparks.

Off course, he fought to turn, to turn in time. He could feel the Pelican itself creaking with strain as the automats almost took the controls from his hands.

But the yellow hill was moving! He ducked into the shock absorbers that rose to cushion him. Crash! Concussion. Blackness. The need to scramble free.

Blind panic lasted only a moment. Sight returned. Every needle on the panel before him seemed to point a warning finger. Automatic seat ejector must have jammed.

He fumbled the switch and the seat kicked up at him. Soaring through the air, he topped the yellow, flattish peak and plummeted down.



As parachute brakes flapped open, he heard the Pelican explode. Landing jolted him. He wrenched open the door. The hillside seemed to steady. He staggered free and fell to hands and knees.

Clinging to the slope, he looked up at the sky. Smoke billowed up from the other side of the hill. He sighed. Looking about him, he suddenly chuckled almost inanely. Fleeing like that, in sympathy with one's mate, forgetting the initial pursuit in mutual danger in spite of the unreason of it—that was mad as only a human can be mad.

He sobered quickly, took stock of his situation. Official rescue was probably out of the question. Brocky might easily have suffered the same fate as himself.

Fifteen minutes of waiting decided him. The city was out of sight beyond those jagged rocks. He began to climb and slither down the slope. Brocky might have fared worse than he, but the only hope of rescue was to fetch it. From that grim ridge against the sky, he would see the city.

A faintly clanking hum brought him to a sudden halt. He stared around cautiously. And, from around the side of the hill below, came a strange kind of conveyance. Wheel-less, rigid-topped, it nevertheless seemed to move as a caterpillar does, many legs rippling rhythmically.

Uncertainly, he watched it approach. It stopped quite close to him. No voice sounded, but he was aware of some kind of urge—a half compulsion to sit in the seat upon it.

He found himself moving towards it, feet shuffling. He stopped, chilled. If it only had wheels, he reasoned, he would know that it was of human origin. Yet—it was most certainly a machine.

Against his will, his feet were edging forward again. In alarm he battled to retain control of himself. In frenzy, born of stark panic, he wrenched half around—

But . . . the next thing he knew he was sitting on the machine, wet with cold sweat, while the ground slid smoothly below. He tried to rise, found that he could not.

There was an opening in the hillside, a trap raised on levers, not hinged. His queer conveyance carried him inside, along a rough-cast passage of some bluish metal, phosphorescent. Somewhere ahead myriad movements chattered and hummed. Hatches, not doors as he knew them, lined the walls of the passage now. Something—like an enormous bluish beetle—passed him. A dull clang, as of a closing hatch, reverberated, but he could not turn his head.

A pin-point of light swelled to an oval at the end of the passage. He was carried through into yellow light, light golden as that of the sun outside, and the machine stopped.

Finding he could move, he looked around, and he gasped. Twenty feet to his right was a sheer wall of tiny mechanisms, levers, catchments, globes recognisable as valves, electric and electronic gear in bank upon bank.

Slipping from the seat, he looked along the narrow ledge on which he stood. On either end, vertical ladders rough-made and welded, and of astonishing width of rung, lined the in-sloping walls.

He gripped the handrail. The wall of flashing, moving, chattering mechanisms took his breath away. Extending several hundred feet both up and down, they formed a gigantic, equilateral triangle, at first glance of little width. His engineer's mind absorbed the orderly array of connections leading down from the apex, spreading and re-spreading right down to the blur of the lowest line.

A quick estimate of possible combinations of connections staggered him, intrigued him, even before he noticed that the apex had considerable width and that the gigantic triangle was backed with many other, duplicate triangles—fifty or more.

By peering through tiny gaps, he could glimpse a different genus of machines at work. And, near the centre layers, perhaps thirty thicknesses from him, were other mechanisms, although these, alone in that hill of light and movement, were quiescent, still.

First impressions passing, he noted cat-walks, hooks and rails—as though provision had been made for repairs and alterations. But there was no way, that he could see, across to the triangles—unless those short ladders could

be thrust out to connect with one of the narrow balconies such as that on which he stood.

He began to peer around for the supports of the triangles. Finding none, he came to the conclusion that they must be held in force with magnetic fields.

It seemed to him that he was being watched, but nothing remotely human showed in the luminous, flickering light of the incredible cavern.

Moreover, it seemed that he was being silently urged to take some action. Cautiously he allowed his mind to go blank and he found himself turning. On the metal wall behind him, his eyes fastened their attention on a long, curious tool held in a clip.

His hand reached up to it, pulled it free. He turned and lifted it up as though to throw it violently at the superimposed triangles.

And he felt himself gripped and held. The tool slipped from his nerveless fingers. The entire wall of relays silenced and darkened. A light seemed to move from the lofty apex, down and to one side. It branched out, leaving trails of tiny, glowing lights. Other mechanisms came back into motion as he lowered his arm, until the giant whole was as active as before.

He felt he had been taught a lesson. The machine guarded itself. It was, then, capable of thought. It was—or rather the part before him in the triangles was—a thinking machine. A brain.

The brain, obviously, had captured him. He recalled the picture show in the City: the battle of the humans and moving hills.

So the moving hills still existed—still . . . was “lived” the correct word?

For a while he remained lost in speculation, fascinated by the actuality before him. Origin, purpose and future were small voices; the wonder of the mechanical existence filled him—the miracle of it!

All the robot devices of Earth were toys compared with this. Whereas on Earth each was designed for a single purpose, whether the mere opening of a door or the solving of complex problems, this was all-purpose, of infinite possibilities—in one word: “alive”.

No doubt entered his mind of its mechanical perfection. To have survived, it must be perfect. And, being perfect, it must be more than human. There would be none of the fuzziness of human thought—no hesitation—no chance of a wrong solution to any given problem. Huge, necessarily so to duplicate the processes of independent thought, it might be; but that was not the marvel . . .

Thinking to reach up to the primary selector at the apex of the triangles, he walked to the wide ladder upon the left-hand wall. Sweat rolled off him as he climbed steadily in that warm, ozone-tainted atmosphere.

He emerged into an empty room, above the triangles and evidently within the peak of the hill. Dust coated the chairs and tables and desks and streaked the glass of the floor and of a large, central dome upon it.

Wiping the dome with hands that trembled from exertion and excitement, he peered in at a bucket seat and adjacent, slanting switchboard. Upon a television screen set in this, a picture of hills slid slowly by.

Presently he was guided to a food store within this room, and although the meats, fruits and vegetables were strange they did not upset his digestion.

In the hours that followed he began to learn as the machine-brain guided him. Within days, he came to understand much of the vanished biology of

the planet as he performed experiments with preserved seeds and plant foods and growth-producing lamps. But always the experiments ended with the destruction of what he had done. A machine would emerge from a hatch in the wall and systematically wreck his work, or a puff of dust from the wall would reduce green-stuff to black slime.

For his own part, he gradually became aware of the need for caution. Whatever hypnotic force the machine could put out was only strong in a negative way. It could hold him motionless, could take away his consciousness, but it could not do more than suggest an action. If he found the suggestion too strong, he schooled himself to revolt.

The idea of the machine dominating him completely was repugnant. To battle against loss of identity was instinctive.

Of the machine itself he learnt little. He was permitted to move about the galleries and corridors, but soon realised there was nothing to be gained through such limited explorations.

The smaller machines, like huge bugs, crawled purposefully around the labyrinth of the hill. He watched them at work. Single-purpose robots these, yet a necessary part of the whole. Some were occupied entirely in maintaining sections quite evidently in their control. They moved out on to the triangles or into hatchways only, however, when he was not close to them. Others appeared to leave the hill and to return, ant-like, from their missions, carrying rocks glinting with ores or crystals. Interior and exterior economy, he reasoned.

Loneliness did not bother him, but he sometimes took out his photograph of Marylin and wondered whether he would see her again, and sometimes he speculated as to the fate of his mate. If only Brocky's agile, unpredictable mind were here. Together he felt they could do so much more than himself alone.

Waking one morning he looked up into Marylin's beautiful eyes. He was aware of the Space Station, the *Chesterfield's* voyage, the planet of the Moving Hills, and the Imprisonment, all as incidents within a dream. She smiled at him. Her dark eyes twinkled provocatively as her lips curved. A breeze seemed to ruffle through her curls and her onyx ear-clips shone . . . with reflected sunlight.

Suddenly, in spite of himself, his flesh crawled.

He sat up. Perspiration dewed his face clammy as he looked around the empty room.

He trembled as a hatch slowly opened. Brocky strode jauntily in, bushy eyebrows lifted. "Did you call, Colin, old sport?"

"No!"

Colin shook his head . . . and the apparition had gone when he looked again. He started to his feet. The blankness of terror was illuminated by sudden realisation. The machine played tricks on him. Sensing his need of human companionship, it had tried to humour him. The burning fury in his mind, at first like a single light, broke up into the complex and many-sided activity as reasoning and inner and outside sensations impinged upon the cortex of his brain.

He could feel the soundless advances of the machine, but flung them out.

Dejected and impotent, he sat upon his couch, until presently he became aware of a new kind of activity within the hill.

Looking down through the glass floor, now clean and shining, he saw that the mechanisms which divided the triangles into two separate banks had now come into operation. Some had moved out on to the floor and walls to build up an ever-widening ridge—dividing the broad rungs of the two in-sloping ladders, while others seemed to be severing connections between the two halves.

With quickening interest, he began to take more notice of the interior of the hill. Much had taken place since his entry—all unnoticed in the fascination of the things the machine had taught him.

There were a full sixty triangles—soon to be divided into two equal halves. The constructor machines on the far side had ceased their work, and seemed to be dividing as did the whole. And the whole seemed larger, of greater cross-section than hitherto.

A new peak was rising above the newly completed brain section, as machines both demolished the wall and built it up.

Soon the hill top took on the shape of a saddle, and a new, lofty room, a duplicate of the one which had been his home, took shape. The saddle increased as the hill showed increasing signs of a complete split.

And at length the division was complete. For a while all was still, save for tiny flickering glimmers upon the triangles. Colin noticed that even the television screen with the central dome of his room showed a static scene—of featureless desert instead of interminable hills.

Then the triangles blanked and a single light ran down to branch. The picture upon the screen began to move again. The triangles of mechanisms took on the appearance of extreme activity and they screamed faintly as their chatter merged into a stream of sound.

The newly created hill showed upon the screen. It was moving, for all the world as though in pursuit. Independent mechanisms streamed out of it, like an army of huge bugs preceding it.

These were met with mechanisms coming back from the parent hill. The meeting was violent. Although the clash of it could not be heard within the peak room, the fury of attack and counter-attack, the battle for life was only too obvious.

Both hills had stopped, Colin saw. The conflict swayed back and forth, littering the desert with wreckage and scuffing up confusing dust. Out of the dust odd machines moved swiftly on to each hill. Stony fragments flew as drills ground into the enemy; Colin's hill rang with the staccato thudding of the attack. Unerringly the fighting machines—duplicates of those used against humans in the pictured battle of years before—tore into the newly formed rock and metal as though it were softer than a hardened old shell.

Within the hill, other machines marshalled to repel possible penetration, but now the dust was beginning to settle, and machines were sweeping on to attack the enemy.

A few moments later it was all over. Suddenly the enemy machines ceased their attack, and seemed to change sides. The enemy hill's multitude of legs sank from sight, and the parent hill began to move towards it.

A note of triumph seemed to tinge the chatter of mechanisms. Colin could feel the machine's exultation. He watched in amazement as the parent

mechanical organism sent out machines to dismantle its offspring. It was over.

When movement back towards the distant hills began, nothing remained of the battle save marks on the dust desert. Having now a double complement of worker machines the apparently natural growth of the hill began anew with double the previous activity.

Days passed, and Colin, still refusing to take part in further instruction, began to understand more of the pattern of the machine's existence, especially as the machine, keeping him under guard with two machines, later permitted him more freedom.

The hills obtained their energy in two ways. First, whenever unthreatened by any attack or disaster, they always had glass-like tubes thrust out of hatches to absorb and store sunlight by means of complex molecules of chlorophyll-like green liquids. Second, as a secondary purpose to the quest for construction materials, they absorbed both chemical and radio-active substances mined from various open-cast pits.

Their law of life was that they should grow, animalcule-like, and divide to ensure the continuance of the species. What their original purpose had been, whether made as mere curiosities or as workers—miners perhaps—Colin could not guess. They were there—that was all.

Success of the battle with his particular hill's own division seemed to encourage it to further warlike efforts. Happening upon a small hill, evidently the product of a recent division, it attacked, using the same methods as before, and presently won.

The flurry of construction again increased in pace. It was again approaching a belt of dust desert when Colin sighted another small hill. Immediately it again gave chase. But now the sky was strongly overcast with clouds. Even in his prison, Colin could sense the electric atmosphere of the threatening storm.

As the fighting machines swarmed out to crush the enemy's screen of defence, there was a violent flash of lightning across the sky. Thunder rolled.

Simultaneously the triangles of mechanisms went completely dark. Subsequent flashes revealed everything at a standstill, machines littering the intervening space between the two hills.

The storm—of an unearthly violence—reached a peak of fury, and moved on. Colin's hill drew in its troops and backed away from the lightning-shattered hulk of its intended victim.

By now, Colin could see that a new division was imminent. He knew from what he had seen that the hill was seeking the loneliness of the open desert so that division could take place without threat of attack.

But he could sense the feeling of apprehension which disturbed the balance of the great mechanical brain below him. Before long, he saw the reason, as puffs of dust upon the horizon followed them in remote but threatening silence.

Even as a new peak began to rise beside the old and as the machine halted for the division it could not—because of its nature—postpone, the dust cloud grew larger.

The attack was on ! But the machine, occupied with its own inner activity, seemed unable to organise its defences . . . Colin could feel its fear mounting

as the chatter of mechanisms screamed stridently.

The enemy loomed closer. The frenzy of division and the machine's own struggle to do two operations at once seemed to reach a climax.

Suddenly Colin gasped. The dome that covered the control panel was lifting. As his astonishment changed to curiosity, he felt the machine urging him forward.

He sat in the seat. For a few moments he studied the pictured enemy, now filling the screen. It seemed much larger than any hill he had seen. Tall as well as wider.

Urgency drove him to pore over the controls. He could feel the machine trying to enter his thoughts. No words emerged from that strange communication, but he learnt swiftly in their mutual need.

The defence and offence machines drove out under his control as he snapped switches. Dials and tell-tales came to life keeping him informed of their progress. The overwhelming numbers of the enemy astonished him. Even though his own hill's machines were well over double what appeared to be the normal complement . . .

Something was wrong. Could it be that the enemy had . . . evolved . . . become able to control its own growth ?

Dust swirled and hid the battle, but infra-red pictures leapt into focus at the touch of a switch. Radar-like sweeps told an alarming story of reinforcements. Colin glimpsed them as he joggled switches to take advantage of temporary clarities.

The new machines were not fighters, but of all manner of repair and construction mechanisms. He gasped. This was indeed a new kind of hill. Others he had seen had never brought these into battle.

Without thought and with knowledge that half-surprised him, he milked workers from the swarming mass engaged upon the division, sending them out to meet the new menace. What, he wondered, would his unpredictable opponent do next ?

He glanced down at the floating triangles below him. Their clatter had hushed to the normal activity of division. What, he wondered, could the machine have done, if his own, human brain had not been superimposed upon it ?

Even in organic life evolution was slow, the habits of a lifetime hard to change. In a machine, organised to deal in a fixed manner with certain patterns of events . . .

In a machine . . .

Adaptability to the unexpected . . .

Limitations of machines . . .

Sweat started on his face as he stared at the monster hill which now bore down upon his own motionless hill . . . *it was as unpredictable as Brocky.*

Brocky must be inside it ! Colin reached for a huge switch with sudden decision. The brain below him went blank, even as he touched it. He felt compulsion weighing down upon him as a light moved down from the apex on the outer triangle, and as his fingers dragged.

The switch flung, almost of its own accord it seemed. Shaken by the hypnotic force that had seized upon him, left weak by its sudden cessation, he sank back in the seat, helpless.

Drained of energy, he was vaguely conscious of the passage of time; and

fear speeded his recovery as he struggled in the darkness to grope back to control of himself.

"Colin ! Colin !"

Brocky's bushy eyebrows swam into view. Colin raised trembling hands. "You devil, what did you do . . .?"

"Good old Colin ! Knew you'd make it ! You gave me a nasty turn, though. Well ! I never expected to find you sitting there."

Colin sighed.

"No, sir !" Brocky's eyebrows lifted. "If anyone had asked me if you'd the gumption to beat the hill at its own game, I'd have said no. Guess I might as well have left you to look after yourself instead of searching for you these past weeks."

"You—you devil."

"Silly of you not to alter a few connections and make yourself a super machine to live in. Gets you in good with the hill's mind, and makes you boss."

"You——" Colin weakly hit out, half-playfully, at his mate. But the blow never landed. His fists came to a sudden halt in mid-air.

Brocky laughed mockingly. "A big brother can be useful. Understand ?" Colin did.

Brocky's hill was permitted to absorb the dividing hill that had harboured Colin. Then they headed back for the City from which they had come.

Only narrowly was the annihilation of the hill averted. Brocky's jaunty proposal to bully authority into recognising their achievement brought out a small army of Earthmen.

The hill was left guarded and Brocky and Colin were treated as heroes. The dourer elements of space, filling that outer-world planet, however, seemed unimpressed.

Brocky disappeared for a few hours on the second day, much to the consternation of the authorities concerned. He returned, unabashed and handed Colin the papers of a space ship.

Colin, staring at them in surprise, could only gasp. "You've bought the *Chesterfield* ?" Then, as he noted the purchase price, he made to grab his mate by the throat, but paused as he remembered the guardian hill. He choked instead. "You've wasted my money ! It says here that she's derelict !"

"Was derelict," corrected Brocky. He lifted the kitbag in his left hand. "Remember those out-of-date distributor leads ? Well, before leaving, and as a precaution that we'd not be left behind, I removed enough to . . ."

"You—you—you——" Colin stuttered as Brocky roared with laughter.

"Cheer up," gasped Brocky. "You've got a space ship on the cheap and can go back to your Marilyn as fast as she'll take you. I can handle this end. I've got a young mountain that'll squash any attempt to hinder you——"

"B-b-but—— What'll I use for crew, and for money for fuel and stores ?"

"Idiot," said Brocky. "Haven't you any more sense than a moving hill ? You take money in advance off passengers out and pay for the fuel and stores. I don't suppose you'll have enough left to pay the crew, but the ship's ex-captain didn't tell us that he couldn't pay us until after he had raised money on landing . . . Use your brains, Colin, old sport. Use your human brains . . ."

GROUNDED

By E. C. TUBB

The toast was to celebrate overcoming the final difficulties in making the first flight to the Moon. Somehow it was a little premature.

The first time he read the screaming headlines he felt physically sick, then angry, then desperate.

ROCKET REACHES MOON ?

In a hundred-and-eighty point type it leapt to the eye, forced itself upon the attention, aroused hope, fear, interest. The let-down was in inverse ratio.

A small filler announced that an obscure scientist had claimed to have developed a fuel superior to any yet known. The new fuel should enable escape velocity to be reached, and perhaps a rocket ship would soon be landing on the Moon, etc., etc. The same old trick of news-starved journalism. The near invention of truth. The inflating of the probable to the accomplished. Most readers dismissed the news with a cynical shrug. Jarl Borgsen didn't.

He couldn't. It struck too near home. It sent the blood pounding through an already overstrained heart. Tensed nerves too near the breaking point. The old desperate sense of the need for haste came back, overwhelming logic with the screaming need to hurry.

To be first at all cost. It was his life. His one ambition. To be the first to reach the Moon. He had to be. Had to. At one time it had been the first to cross space. Age, a failing heart, the slowness of progress had forced him to accept the death of that ambition. He had contented himself with the second best. Now it was his ship that must be the first. His ship *would* be first.

Not until he was within the privacy of his office did the driving sense of urgency ease a little. He was surprised to find that he still had the newspaper crushed in his hand. He flung it from him angrily. He knew it was foolish to let a scarehead upset him, but he couldn't help it. It had grown to be a reflex action, a habit pattern. He wouldn't have been without it.

Sudden tiredness made him slump into the big chair behind the desk. He felt very old. Moodily he stared at the battered test rocket on the desk. The first failure, there had been a hundred since. Looking up he stared straight at a huge blown-up photograph of the full Moon. It hung on the wall directly opposite his chair. A perpetual challenge.

Looking at it made him uncomfortably aware of his age. He had been young when it had been taken. Still aglow with the determination to be the first man to navigate the void. He had been older, but still in his prime

when the little test rocket had flared into brief life, and rapid destruction. There had been wars since then. Wars and new fuels, new advances, but also delays. Jarl felt as if he just couldn't afford any more delays.

He pulled a face at the photograph. "I may be old," he said aloud, "but you're older. I'll live to beat you yet." The sound of his voice shocked him a little, and guiltily he turned to work.

The reports were encouraging. They calmed his nerves. None of his known competitors were near success. It was information of an utterly negative kind. He couldn't have done a thing about it had the reports been otherwise, yet he paid well for the information, and considered the comfort it brought well worth the expense.

He left the reports from his own research department until last, savouring the expectation all the more through the delay. This was the first time he had cause to regret it. A test was scheduled for that very morning. Somehow he had forgotten it, or perhaps he had not known about it. The men on the test field were sometimes careless about routine. He sat for a moment while indecision tore into him. Could he drive like a madman and get to the field in time, or? He snapped a switch on the intercom.

"Yes sir?"

"Get me the field hut."

A pause while wires hummed, then, "Field hut here."

"Borgsen. Has the test started?"

"No, sir. We've held it up, waiting for you."

He sighed with relief. "Good. Be with you in half an hour."

"Sorry, sir." The voice sounded apologetic. "We'll have to blast within ten minutes. Weather's breaking."

"Damn."

"You could hear it via intercom, sir."

"Good. Call me back when you're ready, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

Barely had he opened the circuit than the attention call droned from the instrument.

"Yes?"

"Jefferson here, J.B. I really must see you about the accounts."

"Later."

"But, sir, really . . ."

"Later, man. Later." He snapped the switch irritably. Accounts. Costs. Debits. Always there was something coming up to slow down work, t research, cause delays. Couldn't they realise that nothing was more portant than Project One? The intercom droned its demanding call.

"Yes?"

"A Mister Stevenson to see you, sir."

"I'm out."

"Yes, sir."

Silence. The attention call again.

"What is it?"

"Mister Stevenson is a government official, sir. He insists on seeing you."

"No."

"Mister Stevenson is from the Secretary of War, sir." The girl's voice ounded troubled. "He positively insists."

"Better see me, Borgsen." A man's voice sounded above that of the receptionist's. "Bucking the War Department won't get you anywhere."
 "O.K.," snapped Borgsen. "But make it brief."

Stevenson was a man who looked as if somewhere along the line he had discovered that nothing is worth the effort. A tall thin man, with a face carefully schooled to display no emotion, or just the emotion he wished to show. A diplomat trained in the delicate trade of lying while appearing to be telling the truth, and of picking truth from subtle lies. An indescribable tiredness seemed to radiate from him. A cynical appraisal of values. The result of having all illusions torn from him, and having nothing with which to take their place.

He came across to the desk. "Borgsen?" He dropped credentials on the paper-littered surface. Borgsen waved them aside impatiently.

"What do you want?"

"To talk with you."

"Can't it wait?"

"No."

The attention call sounded from the intercom.

"Field hut here, sir. Test almost ready."

"Damn." Borgsen glared at Stevenson in indecision. The other made no move to go and Borgsen couldn't throw him out. Neither did he want to miss the results of the test. Time took the decision out of his hands.

"Blasting minus five, sir. Two. One. Zero." Through the speaker of the intercom came a peculiar whistling roar, the sound of flaming venturitis muffled by thick concrete. The roar whined higher, shriller, died away. In the following silence the steady ticking of the timing apparatus came clearly through the intercom. Silently Borgsen began to count.

Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. Stevenson made as if to speak, but a glare coupled with an unmistakable gesture made him change his mind. Instead he stared at the photograph.

Forty-six, forty-seven. Sweat began to gather on Borgsen's forehead; savagely he wiped it away, his every sense concentrated on the relentless ticking from the instrument on his desk.

Sixty-eight, sixty-nine, seventy. Sweat poured unheeded down his face. A hand seemed to be nestling around his heart. His breath came faster, whistling through his nostrils, sounding strangely loud against the remorseless metallic sounds.

Ninety-three, ninety-four. The round face of the Moon photograph seemed to swell before him. The hand nestling around his heart began to close into a fist. His breath became an actual pain, but for the first time he allowed himself to hope. Perhaps this time would be it. Perhaps this time all the years of time, and all the millions of money spent would be justified. In imagination he could see a slim white cylinder, flame spouting from flaring jets, rising higher and higher. Towards the deep black of space. Towards success.

Hundred and fifteen, hundred and sixteen. There was a roaring in his ears, and he couldn't see clearly any more. The fist around his heart now gripped with an agony almost unbearable, and all around him blackness

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hovered ready to fold him in darkness. Vaguely he became aware of someone near him, of water being splashed into his face, and fingers fumbling at his collar. He struck out wildly, knocking the cup from Stevenson's hand, sending water rilling over the papers on the desk.

Something was wrong. Even as the blackness surged towards him he realised what it was. The ticking from the intercom had stopped.

With a titanic effort of will he thrust the blackness from him. Tore open his collar, brushed a hand across his eyes. "What was it?" he demanded glaring wildly. "What was the count?"

The intercom answered him.

"Minus five plus eight, sir." The voice was cold, impersonal, then suddenly it changed. "You hear that? Minus five plus eight. We've done it, man. By God, we've done it!" A discordant sound of laughter and shouting came from the speaker. A cry of "I bet the old man's tickled pink." Then someone opened the circuit.

Borgsen sat in his chair and for the first time in years felt really relaxed. He opened a box, took out a green capsule, swallowed it with a sip of water. He smiled. Rose from the chair, crossed to the window. For a moment he stood looking down at the vast plant spread over the acres of ground below him. The Borgsen Engineering Works. Founded by his grandfather, developed by his father, milked almost dry by his overwhelming ambition. It didn't matter now, though. He had won. He returned to his chair still smiling.

"What was all that about?"

"Eh?" He had almost forgotten Stevenson. "It should be a secret but I guess it doesn't matter now. Minus five plus eight means that the test rocket reached a predetermined height five seconds sooner than calculated, and that the fuel lasted eight seconds longer."

He chuckled and drew a deep breath. "But what it really means is that we can now get to the Moon. Do you understand? The Moon is ours whenever we want it. After all the failures this is success."

Stevenson did not smile. He looked a little abashed, a strange emotion for the cold-blooded instrument of government he was. He said nothing.

Borgsen opened a drawer in his desk, took out glasses and a squat bottle. He looked at it fondly. "I laid this by a long time ago, must be all of ten years. I determined to open it only when successful. This is the day." He broke the seal and poured two glasses full of the golden spirit. Pushing one across the desk towards Stevenson he raised the other. "To the Moon," he toasted. "And to the men who got us there."

He drank, coughed a little, wiped his eyes. Seeing Stevenson's untouched glass he raised his eyebrows in mute query.

"Better first catch your rabbit," Stevenson said wryly.

Borgsen laughed a little self-consciously. "I know. We're not there yet. But the fuel is known, the metals, the technology. With what we know nothing can stop us."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

Stevenson sighed. "I wish that you weren't so certain. So confident. So self-assured. There is one thing which can stop you."

Borgsen sat up in the chair. His breath came a little faster as the old sense of urgency came back. "Stop me? Nothing can stop me. I've the men, the money, the resources, the know-how. What could stop me now?"

"Death?"

He shrugged impatiently. "Now you're being pedantic. Of course death could stop me as a person seeing the success of the first Moon flight, but death will not stop the flight being made. The Borgsen ship will still be the first." He gestured towards the drink. "Why don't you drink? It's not poison."

Stevenson picked up the glass, stared for a second at the clear golden contents, then at the man behind the desk. He noted the greyish pallor of the skin, the pouches beneath the eyes, the tell-tale throbbing of the vein in the neck. He felt pity, and for the first time hated what he had to do. He drank quickly, savouring the mellow spirit. Carefully he set the glass down.

"I said that there is one thing which can stop you. I'm here to tell you what that thing is."

Borgsen laughed tolerantly. "Save your breath. There is no need for argument. Nothing will stop me."

"I will," Stevenson said quietly. "I must."

"You?"

"Not only I," corrected Stevenson. "What I represent. The Government."

"The Government?" Borgsen turned livid. The vein in his neck began to swell and pulse. "What the hell are you talking about, man? What has the Government got to do with me as a private individual making a Moon flight?"

"The Government cannot recognise the rights of a private citizen when opposed to the common welfare," Stevenson said sharply. "As a patriot you should know and accept that fact."

"There is a vast difference between regard for the common welfare and meddling interference," retorted Borgsen. "You talk as if I were endangering society. I'm not a criminal. All I am doing is to hasten progress a little. Is that wrong?"

"No, that is not wrong. But you misunderstand me. All I am trying to do is to convince you that your projected flight must not take place."

Borgsen leaned back in helpless anger. "Am I going crazy? I only did what the very Government itself has been doing for years, trying to build a rocket ship capable of reaching the Moon. They knew what I was about. They have even helped me with atomic fuels and up-to-the-minute data. They knew what I was after, and now you come along and tell me . . ."

Rage gripped him. A fist slammed down on the heavy desk. "To hell with them! I'll build the ship and be damned to the Government. This is a democracy. I'm a free citizen. Let them stop me if they can."

"The Government control all atomic piles and by-products of same, that includes your fuel. They can mobilise your plant, conscript your technicians, cut off your supply of raw materials." Stevenson smiled grimly. "Oh, yes. They can stop you. One way or another."

"Then I'll appeal to the people. If there is any justice in this world I'll get it. I'll pillory you in the press. I'll create such a smell that your precious

Government will be kicked out of power. I'm not the only one who thinks that some people are too big for their boots."

"The Civil Service does not change," pointed out Stevenson. "Neither do certain aspects of foreign policy. The end result would be the same, but you would have done grave harm to the peace of the world."

"What?"

"Surely you don't think that I'm here for mere fun? Haven't you yet asked yourself why we don't want you to make the Moon flight?"

Borgsen sneered. "I don't have to think. For ten years you've been trying. Approbations have grown bigger and bigger. Top brass has rested easy. The taxpayers' money has been used, wasted, thrown away. Now you're on a barrel. You can't stand investigation, so you've got to get there first. Well you won't. I've beaten you to it."

Stevenson stared at him in amazement. Until this moment he hadn't really realised the strength of Borgsen's megalomania. Pity made him withhold the truth. Though he didn't know it, Borgsen was two years too late.

"That isn't it," he said mildly. "Who makes the first flight isn't as important as that; it mustn't be made at all. The reason," he said softly, "is politics."

"Politics?"

"Yes. Strange isn't it. Something you never even thought about. To you politics is voting now and again. Trying to get Government contracts. Grumbling at the taxes. Politics is more than that. You're learning the hard way, but there is a harder."

"And that is?"

"War."

"You're crazy." Borgsen leaned forward and picked up the bottle. "Might as well finish it now it's open." He poured the glasses full. "Better think of a different boggy to scare me, that one leaves me cold."

Stevenson smiled. "It would do, but not quite in the way you mean." He picked up the glass, drank, stared at it thoughtfully for a while. "You still don't take me seriously, do you?"

"To be frank, no," Borgsen grinned. "I'll admit that at first you had me worried, but when you began to talk of politics and war, well, I'm not a child to be scared into giving up what I want most."

"If there were no other way to stop you giving up the Moon flight, I'd kill you now," said Stevenson calmly.

Borgsen gulped. He stared hard at Stevenson but nothing in the other man's face or voice showed other than that he meant exactly what he said. "By God," faltered Borgsen, "I believe you'd do it."

"Think of two dogs," Stevenson said. "They are both big strong animals and each has a bone. One dog is satisfied with his bone, the other is greedy. He wants both of the bones. He would take the second bone but he is afraid. If he tries to take it then he is going to get hurt, seriously hurt. The bones are the world, you can guess who the dogs are."

Borgsen nodded. "But what has that to do with me?"

"Politics. Politics have grown beyond the tribe, state, or even nation. They are now world-wide, even wider. You know the situation. Two powers. They have the largest land mass. We have the best technology.

They have one way of life. We have another. They want us. We want to be left alone." He smiled grimly. "A pretty situation. Throw in atomic explosives, radioactive dusts, a fanatical fifth column, a half-dozen petty wars we both call other than what they really are, and you have all hell in the making."

Borgsen shifted uncomfortably, reaching for the bottle.

"We enjoy an atomic peace, if I may call it that. We have the bomb but so have they. Perhaps not as many or so powerful as ours, but they can absorb more atomics than we can."

"Are you sure they have the bomb?" asked Borgsen doubtfully.

"They have it. I told you they have a fanatical fifth column. We have merely an efficient secret service, it can never be quite as good."

"But I still can't see what all this has to do with the Moon flight?"

Stevenson sighed. "Stop thinking of the Moon as a photograph on a wall, a place to be the first man to reach. Think of it as it really is. A world. An untapped source of potential riches. A perfect site for atomic piles; no need to worry about disposal of waste there, you know. Then think of it as we do, and as they do, a launching site for rocket projectiles. You begin to understand?"

Borgsen nodded. "But surely that means we must get there first. We just can't allow them to beat us to it."

"I agree. But don't forget they think exactly the same. Neither of us

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dares allow the other to get there first. The first ship touching the Moon will claim it as a territorial possession. The way things are now even that would lead to war. We don't dare let them establish a base on the Moon, and for exactly the same reasons neither do they."

"But then, what? You can't hold up the flight forever."

Stevenson shrugged. "I don't know. Twelve years ago we were allies. In another ten years we may be the same. Something will be worked out. Something must. At the moment though all we can do is to make sure there will be no excuse for war."

Borgsen groaned. "Ten years. I can't wait that long. I don't think I can last out." He looked up pleadingly. "Is there no other way?"

"You think I like it?" Stevenson said bitterly. "You think I like dancing to the tune set by power-mad dictators the other side of the world?" He clenched his hands. "If there were any other way we'd take it, but there is none. Sometimes I wish we'd have a showdown, get rid of this fear for always, one way or another." He sighed. "But then I think of the babies, the women, the countryside. I think of atomics and what they could do to them, and I carry on, but I still don't like it."

He rose abruptly. "Well, Borgsen, have I convinced you? Have I justified the order to ground the Moon flight?"

Borgsen nodded dumbly.

"There will be compensation," promised Stevenson gently. "Build your ship, you may yet be the first. Government contracts will ease your financial loss." He hesitated. Held out his hand. "Watch your health, fellow. I for one want to see you make it."

"Thanks," said Borgsen listlessly. He ignored the proffered hand. He sat as if crushed, wide-eyed, gently caressing the little test rocket before him. He looked very old and ill. Stevenson noticed one other thing, then he shut the door softly behind him.

The pretty receptionist was waiting impatiently outside and as she saw him she smiled. "I bet he's on top of the world, isn't he?"

"Why?"

"We heard the results of the test. We all know what it means to him, and we've a surprise for him."

"Yes?"

"Sure. Look." She gestured towards a huge framed portrait of Borgsen. It was symbolic. He stood on the Earth and held the Moon between his hands. The artist had cleverly caught an expression of extreme rapture. It was the sort of thing that would have appealed to Borgsen had things been otherwise.

"Do you like it?"

"Very nice," he agreed. "But I wouldn't give it to him yet."

"Why not?" She looked hard at him. "What's wrong? What have you done to him?"

He looked at her pretty face reflecting her fierce loyalty. He thought of the man he had just left, old, ill, the tears streaming down his cheeks. He felt ashamed.

"Done?" he said quietly. "I think I've broken his heart."

He strode quickly from the office. The look in her eyes was not good to see.

· LOSER TAKE ALL

By N. K. HEMMING

The conqueror usually becomes absorbed into the political and cultural life of the vanquished. It could be a good thing for Earth as a whole.

Illustrated by QUINN

The sky was blue, Sol shone benignly, in fact it was as bright and merry a day as ever bathed the Welsh highlands.

Mike fully appreciated it, and was inclined to feel just as bright and merry. He looked at Liza and lovingly patted her sleek curves.

Liza was unresistant, but unresponsive. It must be admitted she could not have been anything else, still Mike loved her, in spite of that and her queer shape.

"Baby, I love you."

Liza could have looked smug at this, but she did not—she was a spaceship, the first man-carrying moonship. Since he would be the man in question, he was rather inclined towards the hope that she would not decide to stay there permanently once she reached the surface of Earth's cold and inhospitable satellite.

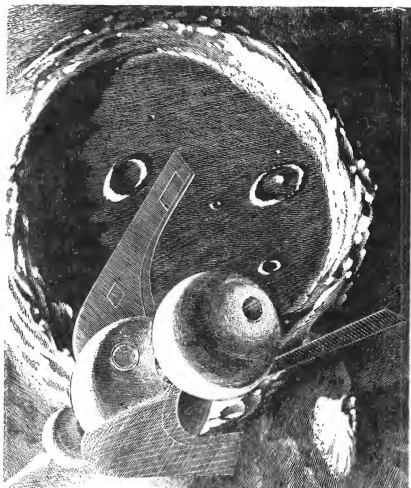
Poor Liza, her builders had had no consideration for her feelings when they designed her. She had none of those sleek, slender lines so beloved of fantasy artists, and ended up a weird flying dumb-bell, with an extra globe in the centre. The outer two sported great gaping holes fore and aft, outlet thrust tubes for the working fuel of the two lightweight atomic piles housed by the spheres.

Mike Lanie was a lucky addition to the builders of Liza. Originally a test pilot, he had drawn their attention with the weird and wonderful things he was doing with acceleration. Mike had not been in the least averse to the proposition they put to him. What man would?

For ten years he had worked with the scientists and technicians, being prepared for the job he had to do and, as Liza was an entirely revolutionary type of craft, the whole project was shrouded in the closest secrecy.

They did not know that that very secrecy would stand them in good stead in an incredible way.

LOSER TAKE ALL



Outside of the station it was a crazy world, squabbling on the brink of atomic destruction, but Project Four shunted aside the mundane problems of a world that was inconsiderate enough to want to go to war, and concentrated instead on their own dreams.

They were more fortunate than the other groups of their kind, who usually struggled along on minimum amounts of that most necessary commodity—money.

Project Four found their leading scientist must have absently married the daughter of a millionaire and when the latter two came down too quickly in a jet liner, the former got the millions.

From the centre globe, the pilot's compartment, a girl emerged and his

eyes strayed from Liza's metal curves in favour of softer ones.

Jane Lawrence was a brilliant mathematician and research chemist and, with a name and profession like that should have been a very studious and unattractive girl blinking owlishly through horn-rimmed glasses. However, she was not, and her construction and general lines left nothing to be desired. She was tall and slim but, as Mike had noted on the occasion he first saw her, the curves were all there and in just the right proportions and places.

She closed the great insulated door, smiling as she saw him.

"Still standing in silent adoration?"

"Sure," but his eyes were nowhere near Liza.

"Some day, young man," she commented severely "a foolish maiden might take you seriously."

"Is that a promise?" He grinned, then his head went on one side consideringly. "Nope, guess that's too much to hope for. 'Tis said, cruel maid, thou hast a few pints of rocket fuel in thy veins, instead of the usual sticky goo."

They sparred good naturedly, not knowing how soon the peace of the afternoon was to be disrupted.

A new sound impinged upon their consciousness and they turned with a sudden, illogical, premonition of impending disaster.

A jeep tore towards them, as if its driver was trying to ram the accelerator through the floorboards. It skidded to a stop with screeching brakes, and a pop-eyed driver leaned out.

"Is the Professor inside?" gesturing towards Liza."

"No. He is in his study." It was Jane who replied, startled. "Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong!" he yelled. "That wasn't thunder we heard this morning—it was an atomic bomb going off over London!"

"What!" the two horrified voices came together.

"Move over," Mike said grimly. "We'll all go find the Professor," and the jeep with its three occupants careered off towards an old-fashioned farmhouse.

"What happened?" Jane asked.

The driver glanced round. "Haven't any details. A friend of mine 'phoned me five minutes ago, said London was completely flattened out. He wanted to know if we had heard anything about what was going on."

"I wonder what could have happened?" she said worriedly.

"Lady, anything could happen with that little yellow devil bossing things at Veronzgrad," Mike retorted grimly.

She frowned, slowly nodding her head.

The bid for world government had not brought peace, only two powerful factors who were deadly enemies. For years the Western United States and the Peoples States had sparred over the Conference table, an open powder keg ready to go up. It only needed a spark . . .

The jeep reached the house and its passengers piled out, almost knocking Professor Lawrence flying as he came out of the house like a rampant hurricane. He was livid and had obviously heard the news.

"The blithering, idiotic imbeciles," he raved. "Don't they realise what they are starting. There will be nothing left for them to play kings and dictators with," and proceeded to give his opinion of governments in general. They gathered that it was not very complimentary, involving as it did a rather

repeated use of the words "blue-nosed baboons" in regard to their ancestry.

"What news have you had?" Mike asked, when the irate redhead paused for lack of breath.

Lawrence glared at him, as if he was personally responsible for what had happened. "Plenty," he barked. "London is gone. The bomb exploded a thousand feet up. For about 40 miles stone turned liquid and the devastation is general for another hundred miles. Heaven only knows how many millions have been killed," he ended starkly.

"Whew!" Mike breathed bleakly. "Must have been one of the newer type hydrogen bombs."

Jane glanced at her father. "We had better go in," she suggested quietly. "Something might come over the radio."

The radio announcement duly came, but nothing more nor less than what they already knew, mystifying while it shocked. Strangely, no flood of rocket bombs followed that first and, before the Western States could retaliate, the other side denied all responsibility for the attack. They sparred wordily but, from the urgency of their reply to the accusations levelled at them, they did not want out and out war.

But why make the attack and then deny it? None of the common citizens believed them and even the governments were puzzled when their secret service could root out no clues.

Men and women looked at each other suspiciously and in their eyes was the fear of atomic war. Even let a few survive and they would have little chance in a world poisoned by radiation and starved of food.

But, even so, knowing this, the majority cried for retaliation.

Then, on the eve of the West's declaration of war, unidentifiable aircraft were seen surveying the ruins of London. The fact that those aircraft stayed the declaration, spoke strongly for the effect their strange and totally alien appearance had on the world.

Nobody really got a good look at them, but the glimpses they had were enough. The moment they were spotted the craft had a habit of doing a fantastic tailflip and disappearing at an equally fantastic speed—straight upwards.

In the chaos accusations flew back and forth—then the second bomb fell on Moscow.

The first and most deadly stage of that brief terrible war was over and Jane Lawrence stood outside the farmhouse, looking at Liza's bulk in a nearby field.

It was an attractive scene, albeit a trifle wild, one that the war had not yet touched, only Liza striking an incongruous note.

Project Four looked to be no more than a small farm in the Welsh mountains. The place had originally been a secret Government research station during world war two, taken over by Lawrence and his colleagues in 1953. The laboratories were underground, with the living quarters of most members of the station, and, although Jane had been born in the house, she had not known of the secret door in the cellar until she had taken her chemistry degree years later.

She wandered back into the house, finding Mike standing alone in the middle of the room, looking thoughtful.

"Have you ever thought, Jane," he said slowly "that someone else could have started this war."

"Someone . . . ?" she began blankly.

"Yes." He cut across her words impatiently. "Both sides drop bombs and, supposedly, know nothing about it. If the Peoples' States did send that first bomb, from a military angle, it was a mistake. They should have sent hundreds and destroyed our defences, before we could strike back." He rubbed his chin in a thoughtful gesture he had copied from Lawrence. "It could add up to somebody wanting the war to start. The governments were too scared to do so—so they gave them the kick along they needed."

"It makes sense," she said thoughtfully "but who would be crazy enough to actually want to start an atomic war. They would know their own chance of survival would be slight."

"I know. That's the one thing against the theory." His eyes narrowed. "I wish one of those 'ghost' planes would pay us a visit. I could follow it and find where it comes from. That way we might discover who really did start the war."

"What in ? We have no aircraft here and, in any case, everything is like a snail compared to them."

He glanced out of the window meaningly. "Except Liza !"

"Liza !"

He shrugged. "I have flown her before on the test runs and she's all provisioned for the Moon flight I should have taken yesterday."

"Anyway, we should have to wait for one of them to pay us a visit," she said practically "and I don't suppose . . ."

She broke off, realising he was not listening to her and her eyes, following the direction of his, saw through the window what was causing his look of sheer disbelief.

"Can you see it too ?" he whispered and rubbed his eyes.

'It' stayed.

Roughly oval and banded round its widest part with a ring of purple standing out like a ballet dancer's skirt, the utterly alien thing hung about two feet from the surface of Liza's central sphere, the purple light dancing happily in the sun.

Even as they watched, with breath-taking suddenness one blunt end turned Earthwards. The purple ring slid down, contracting slightly as it circled the tail. For a moment it stayed like that, then went up vertically, out of sight in seconds.

"Some sort of energy repulsion between ship and ring," Jane commented absently. "The ring projected from the ship would . . ."

A startled gasped from Mike cut across her academic summing-up.

"What on earth !" he muttered blankly.

But those words started an entirely new train of thought and he saw from her widening eyes that the fantastic idea had dawned in her mind also.

"Mike !" she said incredulously. "It's the answer. No Earthly brain could have conceived such an utterly alien thing."

Mike came out of his trance, galvanised into instant action.

"You said it ! If Earth owns that thing I'll eat my hat. It must have caught sight of Liza in the distance and came nearer to investigate." He spun round for the door. "You sit yourself at the radio and I will play commentator.

This is what we have been waiting for. I'm going after it. If we can get a line on those ships it might stop those other fools fighting while there is still anyone left alive."

"But, Mike, they might go to . . . to . . ." she broke off with an unhappy gulp.

"To where?" He smiled with narrowed eyes. "Just where would such a base be situated, near enough to Earth for convenience, but a spot where nobody would dream of looking for them and could not find them if they did?" He shook her gently as shocked comprehension dawned. "Brainy child. You've got it."

"The otherside of the Moon!" She paled. "But . . . it's fantastic . . . Earth invaded!" She reached for the house telephone. "I'll call the Professor."

He grabbed the instrument. "Hold it. There's no time for any arguments." He grinned and unexpectedly bent and kissed her. "See you later, honey."

"Mike . . ." she stopped as she realised she spoke to an empty room and that same premonition of impending disaster that had held both of them when they saw the approaching jeep, fell over her now. "See you later, Mike," she whispered ". . . I wonder."

A few minutes later she stood at the underground duplicate control panel with the Professor, listening to Mike's voice explaining what he was doing.

"You realise what you might be up against, Mike," Lawrence said gravely. "I have never seen these aircraft, but I trust in the judgment of my daughter and yourself. If there is anything in your supposition, it will not only be the dangers of space you will have to face, but possibly a ruthless and unscrupulous enemy—who most probably will not even be human."

"Sure, Professor, but I've got to play this hunch out. It might be hooley, but at least we will have reached the Moon," he finished with a laugh.

"All right," Lawrence returned gravely. "Are you ready?"

The first space traveller looked round his tiny compartment, well sprung and lined with foam rubber, glanced at the two-way microphone fixed above his recumbent figure, and nodded to himself.

"O.K. Let her rip!"

He tensed, waiting for the shock, then deliberately forced his taut muscles to relax.

Wham!!!

Liza ripped, shot off the ground in a kaleidoscope of colour and a full symphony orchestra of noise.

Even if he could have seen what was going on, Mike would not have appreciated it. He was too occupied at the moment assuring himself that he was not really going through the flooring. He was not actually a stranger to that particular sensation, pressure and he were old enemies, but it never improved with acquaintance.

Must be nearly the second burst. The electronic brain took care of that. Instinctively he tensed for it. No, must not do that, the worst possible thing.

With a sickness in his stomach he felt the second blast let go.

The padded floor felt like concrete now, his head throbbed dully and there was a crushing weight on his lungs. Sick and dizzy he waited for the third blast and when it came felt himself being slowly and mercilessly flattened out.

The tightness in his lungs grew, his surroundings misted. He knew the fourth blast was coming, and cringed before the agony it would bring.

"Liza," he murmured, painfully reproachful. "And I thought you were my best girl."

Then the fourth thrust let go and he blacked out. He did not feel the fifth one, did not know when the engines cut out and Liza slid away from Earth at escape velocity.

The Professor switched the radio on full strength and looked over at his daughter, sick apprehension in his eyes.

"Why doesn't he answer. Even if he blacked out he should have recovered by now." He turned back to the transmitter, calling Mike again. "Project Four to Liza. Come in Mike. Are you all right?"

There was a grunt, then, at last, his voice. "What's all the fuss. Waking a guy up from his beauty sleep!"

"How do you feel?" Lawrence asked quickly.

"Fine, except for a bit of a headache. Be with you in a moment. We'll continue this chatty interlude in my boudoir."

The two Lawrences smiled. Nothing daunted his spirits for long, not even the thought of the fantastic mission he was on.

Slithering along the yielding floor, he found the door, cautiously edging himself into the tiny cabin on the other side, where everything was securely fastened to the floor.

Occupying part of one wall was what looked like a television screen. It was, the only difference being that the transmitter was outside the ship.

Beneath this futuristic looking effort a set of complicated dials and gauges showed that Liza was performing like the thoroughbred she was.

Inadvertently he let go of the hand rail and floated ceilingwards. Expressing himself freely and fluently, he hauled himself down again and headed for the television screen, switched on, to be confronted by a bewildering array of stars, far brighter than he had ever seen them before.

The Professor and Jane were suddenly startled by a burst of nursery rhyme delivered in a childish treble.

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you is."

"It is evident that you have recovered from your headache," Lawrence commented dryly.

"Sure. It's just like a weekend joy-ride up here."

He was like that all the time, all the 9½ hours of the flight, snatching brief rests in between, trying to keep a flippant note there to cover the deadly seriousness of it all.

Although Jane smiled reluctantly at his audacious quips, she knew there was something just a little too reckless in his voice. Did Mike, too, have a hunch?

The moon hung astoundingly near in the screen and Mike hastily interrupted the Professor as a bell rang in the cabin.

"The mastermind's taking over now. Be with you later."

Once again he settled himself in the snug little rubber compartment and the electronic brain proceeded to release bursts of energy from the forward tubes to cut their speed.

This time he did not black out and was able to go back to the other room, Liza now merely cruising, without any ill effects.

The screen, still on, showed a vast greyish-white crater-pitted expanse,

desolate and inhospitable, a scene that not even a nightmare imagination could have conjured up back on Earth.

It was at that moment that he felt the impact of what was happening, the fact that in a very short time he would actually land on the Moon.

Then, abruptly, he remembered his mission and his wide humorous mouth set grimly.

The bell rang again, but this time it was a gentle, gradual release of energy from the frontal tubes, slowing their speed still further as Liza's course carried her in an arc towards the hidden side of the Moon.

By now he had had time to cogitate on the fantasy of finding unearthly visitants, but absurd as it might seem, he had a feeling there might be something in it.

There was.

Call it fate, coincidence, that Liza's plotted course should take her to that particular crater, but approach it she did.

He drew a sharp breath, looking fixedly into the screen, and a single choice phrase fell from his lips.

Back on Earth, Jane blushed and the Professor leaned forward eagerly.

"What is it, Mike?"

"Just what we expected," he said exultantly. "Spaceships! Dozens of them! And, brother, that one we saw is a midget compared with these babies."

Back of the Lawrences a small bunch of technicians and laboratory assistants gathered. The Professor looking at the pale faces surrounding him, read apprehension in every one.

"So, it is true," he said slowly. "Earth is being invaded by an alien race."

A man pushed himself to the front of the crowd. "Isn't there anything we can do?"

"I don't know." And into the transmitter "O.K. Mike. Come back now. We have found out what we wanted to know."

Mike laughed grimly and watched the alien ships, so much nearer now.

"And they know we have found out. What happens now?"

"Don't stop to find out," Lawrence returned, equally grim. "Turn Liza and head for home. We've got to convince these crazy Governments of the urgency of pooling their resources against these aliens. All our wars have never prepared us for this. They can strike at us without loss and we have no way of hitting back. Liza is the only ship of her kind. Two years would be the least any more could be built in."

"Two years too many," Mike retorted. "It is nice and accommodating of them to bunch their ships up together," he added musingly. "If we had one of our much vaunted atomic bombs it might even things up for us."

"Liza can do the journey again," Lawrence said quickly. "We will pack her full of explosives and guide her back again by remote control."

"Very pretty. What are our Lunar friends doing while this is going on?" he asked dryly, then his voice changed to a note of quiet seriousness. "You know it's no use, Professor. There is only one way to stop them."

Jane blanched as she realised what he meant, but even his next words did not enlighten her father.

"I'm getting nearer now. What happens if Liza crashes?"

"The atomic bomb would have nothing on you." He stopped aghast at the

thought that suddenly flashed into his brain. "You can't do it, Mike!"

"What difference does it make, Professor? We'll all be dead pretty soon when those purple-ringed jobs really get going. Anyway," he added quietly "what makes you think they will let Liza get back?"

They heard him whistling blithely—then the transmitter went dead.

Jane made a quick impulsive movement to the radio, and Lawrence put out a hand, unthinkingly crushing a small plastic container. In the laboratory there was silence, tense and desperate, yet a hopeless silence.

"Goodbye, Mike," Jane whispered.

Mike glanced again into the screen. The crater was nearer, the huge bulk of the ships plainly visible in all detail. He reached out a hand and disconnected the electronic brain. He was on his own now, and he was no longer smiling, or whistling.

Under his hand lay five levers, the manual energy control.

Already Liza was tipped for a landing. It needed only another gentle burst from her front tubes to bring her to a safe descent. The controls were under his hand—the rear tube controls.

There was a stir of activity down below, a soft purple light began to glow. He did not wait to find out what it meant. Down went the five levers—all together.

Liza leapt forward, straight and true, five tubes flaring with an annihilating burst of energy.

Afterwards there was silence, the eternal cold silence of the Moon.

They did not know of on Earth, nor had Mike seen, that second alien base.

It seemed as if, at first, Mike's sacrifice was to be in vain, but in the end a battered and unbelieving Earth was convinced. It did not do them much good. They were almost leaderless, their cities smashed, millions already dying of starvation, many millions more from eating food contaminated by radiation. Some districts, all communications destroyed, even went on fighting.

Then the aliens came.

Simultaneously all over the world, at dawn in England, purple-ringed ships slid silently down from the clouds. The shock pulled Earth together. Now they actually had something they could see to fight, and they hit back with everything they had, 'planes, shells, guns, with no chance of survival. From the beginning there was no hope. It vanished with the remnants of their aircraft in the blinding blue flashes from the alien ships.

Beaten, Earth trembled to feel the iron heel of the conqueror, perhaps the claw of some inhuman monster.

The alien ships landed in groups of five and great translucent shimmering domes went up over them. In a last desperate effort a few remaining atomic bombs were salvaged from the general holocaust and dropped. The shimmering barrier, whatever it was, proved effective, and the bombs exploded harmlessly outside.

Beneath that protecting barrier, for the first time, great doors opened to the atmosphere of Earth and the first alien stepped out on to Earth soil.

He was the average height for them, about seven feet, and dressed in the uniform of the Imperial Kalerin Navy.

The whole of battered Earth looked and gasped—for there stepped forth a man.

LOSER TAKE ALL

He could have been a member of any Earth race, slightly taller than usual, and copper skinned, but, like every other member of the 50 ships, his hair, glowing in the sunlight, shone with an unusual brilliance, a vivid, alien—green.

It was on a morning three days after the landing that the Professor faced the small community that constituted Project Four.

"For the moment," he said "Earth is beaten—but we are not. Our trouble is that Earth has no weapon powerful enough to eliminate the aliens. If we can hold out long enough that may be changed. I will let my daughter explain." He sat down and Jane took his place.

"The project my father speaks of was started two years ago. It concerns the Glen Arne meteorite and no doubt you are all familiar with its peculiar vibrating qualities. It caused quite a stir at the time of its arrival. There are several pieces of it here and the vibrating element has been traced and isolated, although, as yet, we have no knowledge of why it vibrates. As far as we have been able to ascertain, this element is not known anywhere on Earth. The vibration itself takes the form of a supersonic 'whistle' which can cause madness and death if experienced for even a short period.

"The insulator seems to be natural in the rock of the meteorite, like the dockleaf by the side of the nettle," she added with a slight smile. "I have already been working on plans for utilising this material."

"That is our proposal," Lawrence continued for her. "All records of Project Four's whereabouts were destroyed with London and there are no farms for miles on either side of us to even guess at the underground laboratories. We are well into the mountains and to suppose that we ourselves are the only persons to know of Project Four's whereabouts is fairly safe. Let the aliens also remain in ignorance and I am confident that we shall be able to hold out long enough to complete both vibrator and insulators. The invaders came from the stars and we will fight them—very appropriately—with a weapon from the stars."

Those that wished to take their chance outside were told to do so, but none left.

When they were alone in the room, the Professor glanced over at his daughter.

"How long do you think it will take?"

She shrugged. "If we are lucky, five to six months. I have been going over my old notes and there seems a very good chance of success if we can hold out that long, but if more and more reinforcements keep arriving, even supposing we manage to dispose of this lot, we will not have much chance."

"Sometimes I wonder if we have even the slightest chance against a planet so advanced as Kalerin," he said wearily. "It might be a hopeless expenditure of life to go on fighting."

She gave his arm a gentle shake. "Buck up, Professor. We would be lost without you. Of course we have to keep fighting. Our first vibrator will only have a short range, but we will improve it. We will send them mad if they so much as dare enter our atmosphere," she ended determinedly.

Three months later a very disgruntled Earth still had not made up her mind whether she had accepted defeat or not. Small bands of obstinate men



and women held out in isolated districts, although they could not do so for much longer.

The aliens themselves were a surprise to everyone, courteous to the people they had defeated, although they let it be clearly shown who were the masters. Even so, there were the usual ones among them who took advantage of their position and the stories about them, circulating, grew with every telling.

Some people feared them, shrank from the sight of the black and silver uniform, some coldly disdainful, others openly defiant and there was, of course that small, but unfortunately existent, group of traitors out for just what they could get.

Now that they had smashed up Earth's cities, the aliens seemed to take an interest in the world, and unwilling remnants of communities were forced to co-operate in the rebuilding—to alien specifications.

As to Project Four, rumours flew, but nothing concrete. Nevertheless the aliens, for all their strength, were worried. At the moment there was nothing the Earthmen could do, but science and future weapons existed. If such a station existed also, and they believed it did, it must be found. However,

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easier said than done. Nobody even seemed to know the country where it was located.

One thing they did find out, that Liza had been one of the achievements of Project Four. The brains that had built the first spaceship they respected. Once they had had the location, but that unfortunately, for them, had been with the ship Mike had followed from Earth, one of the ships that had been destroyed when Liza made her last spectacular dive into them.

So, hidden in the Welsh mountains, the vibrator slowly took shape.

It was five months after the landing, and they had all been working ceaselessly at Project Four.

Lawrence glanced at his daughter, frowning at the strained, weary, expression that seemed part of her white face nowadays.

"Why don't you go outside for a few minutes? The fresh air will do you good. You have been cooped up here working all day and half the night far too long."

She nodded wearily and pushed the fiery red hair back off her face. "So has everybody else, but I guess you are right, Professor. I'll only go a few steps down the valley."

Outside the sun was shining, and she looked round yearningly. How long now must they skulk underground?

Not forgetful of her promise she only went a short distance down the valley, sat down by a rock-littered stream, out of sight of the house.

She was thinking of Mike and did not see or hear the stranger who came silently through the trees towards her. He was not unattractive and perhaps in the early 30s—but the sun glinted on vividly green hair.

Her first intimation that she was no longer alone came in a reflection in the water. She stiffened with shock and cold fear crept over her. What was an alien doing so far into the mountains?

Without looking round she came to her feet and, with far more assurance than she felt, began to walk back along the valley. Some of the stories about the aliens had not been pretty.

Her quick eyes judged the distance to the house, wondering if she could make it and it was at that moment that she had a peculiar probing sensation in her mind.

"You cannot," a sardonically amused voice said, in very heavily accented English, as if he had read her thoughts. She was too agitated at the moment to remember that probe—and wonder.

She turned then, saw the same sardonic amusement reflected in jet eyes, twisting a thin cruel mouth, and was more afraid than she had ever been in her life, but her face set in a cold proud mask for all that.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing more innocuous than to look at undamaged scenery. That was my only reason for landing." As she breathed a sigh of relief he mistook its cause. "You need not be afraid. I have no intention of harming you."

Jane remained stonily silent, her eyes fixed obstinately on the ground.

"You are good haters," she heard, and was surprised to find a tinge of bitterness in the voice.

She looked up then. "Did you expect us to meet you with open arms and waving flags? Hiding behind another nation until we had weakened ourselves," she finished contemptuously.

"There was a reason for that."

She had a temper to go with her hair and her fear disappeared as it began to rise.

"I am sure there was," she flashed back immediately. "The same reason that made you attack a planet that did not even know of your existence and certainly had never done you any harm."

"After 15 years in space, judgments become warped," he said sombrely. He was looking up the valley, at the peaceful scene untouched by the horrors of atomic war, but she had an idea he did not really see it. "I wonder how your own people would react if they spent 15 years in space—the last ten knowing they had no planet to return to."

Against her will she began to get interested. "What happened?"

He seemed almost to be talking to himself now. "We do not know. We were originally a hundred ships, sent out to chart a little known part of the Universe. We came back after five years, five years of longing to see Kalerin again—and found her gone."

"Gone!" Reluctance was dying from her interest as the scientist triumphed over the girl.

He turned to look at her. "Yes, gone. We do not know what happened, only that a chain reaction must somehow have been set up in Kalerin herself. For ten years we searched for a planet enough like our own to colonise. We could not go on much longer. Too long in space sends men mad." The sombre black eyes turned back over the valley. "You will never understand what that ten years search meant to us. Then we found Earth."

"And Earth will never forget the way in which you announced yourself—even years after you have gone," she said defiantly.

"We shall not go," he returned quietly. "We could do so much to help your people, if they would let us."

She laughed shortly. "That, coming from an alien, is funny."

"Alien!" He too laughed, but without humour, and his impersonal attitude suddenly and unaccountably disappeared. Jane had the impression that he was really seeing her for the first time.

This time she did not stop to measure the distance to the house, but her flight was a vain effort and she was wrenched back ruthlessly by a cruel jerk on her arm that made her wince. Again she had that probing sensation and the alien laughed.

"So . . . I must not disappoint an opinion already so black—and fifteen years is, after all, a long time in space."

It was as if she had tangled in a live magnetic field, but bitter impotent hate glared from her eyes when she managed to tear herself free and one hand went out to strike him full in the face with studied deliberation.

To her surprise, he laughed. "You would not have done that had we not been enemies. Do not try to lie to me. I am telepathic."

She paled and shrank back against a large boulder, remembering, and understanding now, that queer probing. Unbidden the thought of the secret she held came into her mind and desperately she tried to thrust it back, filling her head with a nonsensical nursery rhyme.

But that brief unguarded moment was enough for the alien, and she felt the probe in her mind again, not just idly this time, ruthlessly powerful,

forcing her to forget that protecting rhyme, to think of Project Four, remember all its past, its present—its future plans.

At last that merciless probe was satisfied, her mind freed as the gleaming jet eyes released hers, and she fell back against the rock, white and shaken, the secret of Project Four a secret no longer.

"So," the quiet voice said "you are a scientist of Project Four, one of our bitterest enemies, Jane Lawrence." She looked up as he laughed, without much amusement. "And I am Jorvan—the Commander of the aliens."

Jorvan—the man who had ordered the bombing of Earth !

"I have already sent for some of my men," he said. "Until then you will remain in my own ship."

The probe was not yet in her mind again and she thought quickly. Somehow Project Four must be warned. She had not the advantage of telepathy. That meant she had to escape to get to them herself.

She flung her hands out defiantly on either side of her, gripping the rock. Under her fingers she felt the piece of rock she had noticed before. It worked loose, jaggedly, wickedly, sharp.

"I will not move."

"I should not imagine you are very heavy," he retorted coldly.

He bent down and her hand came up sharply, slashed viciously and remorselessly at his head. The alien dropped without a sound and something dark and sticky began to mat his hair.

She dropped to her knees beside him, thrust a perfectly steady hand beneath the black tunic, but could detect no heartbeat. So much for Jorvan.

Without another glance at her handiwork, she gained her feet and ran towards the house. As she reached the door something made her glance back. A small purple-ringed ship was rising from where she had left Jorvan and she wished she had had a gun with her to finish off the job.

It did not take long to make the Professor realise the position, omitting nothing of what had happened to lead up to her unwilling betrayal.

Lawrence wasted no time in recriminations and regrets. He told every member of Project Four in blunt terms just what had happened and they were again given the chance of escaping, or remaining. Those that stayed would fight—fight with the only weapon they had—the vibrator.

No one left.

The aliens were not long in coming, but by that time every member of Project Four wore a very ordinary metal helmet, that was not in the least as ordinary as it looked, and was their only safeguard against madness and death, a madness of which they would be in the very centre.

Squat and ungainly, the experimental vibrator spread itself across the room, the two Lawrences at the 'phone that connected with the single observer in the glass "sunroom" at the top of the house, three technicians making last minute adjustments to a maze of fine wires leading to a globe where a fine sensitive needle quivered in a vacuum.

A large alien ship neared the valley, her crew all volunteers, and Jorvan himself stood by the side of the pilot. They were right into the valley, hovering there, before Lawrence barked sharply.

"Let them have it."

Jorvan's mistake was in underestimating the potency of Project Four's

weapon. There was no warning, no spectacular display of sparks, no multi-coloured rays. Everything was quiet and peaceful, a typical old Welsh farm.

The alien pilot gave a sharp cry and raised his hands to his head, as if to still the sudden wicked, sharp, throbbing there. The vibrator did not take long to make its awful potency felt.

Jorvan was the next to go, seeing his officers in the room with him clawing frantically at their heads, as if they would reach and tear out their very brains.

"Turn the ship," he gasped. "Get out of range."

But already, in those few brief seconds, the pilot was incapable of understanding him and when Jorvan, fighting his own madness, tried to shake him into awareness, he glared up and made a maniacal lunge at the other man.

"Stop it, you fool." He tore the strangling fingers from his throat and the madness of the vibrator made him strike out savagely.

The pilot slid out of his seat, holding his head in his hands, moaning softly, insanely.

Jorvan fell into the vacated position, more by luck than judgment, and looked at the controls before him dully. Turn the ship! Turn the ship! It beat into his brain to the rhythm of that awful, crazy throbbing.

The controls blurred before his eyes, levers and dials misted into a glittering mass, and he could not remember what they were for. Desperately he forced his mind to saneness, as desperately as Jane had resisted when he tore the secret of Project Four from her.

"More power," said the Professor.

Throughout the ship aliens writhed helplessly on the floor and a contorted figure at the controls fell forward among the maze of switches and dials. Mindless fingers clawed outwards, clutched convulsively at glittering copper levers, jerked sharply on two as the tortured body twisted in the chair.

The vibrator was successful. A few more minutes and every member of the hovering alien ship, Jorvan himself, would slip into madness.

But the copper levers jerked with the twisted body, slid effortlessly along their groove.

Smoothly, silently, the purple ring slipped downwards, the ship performed one of its fantastic tail flips and shot upwards.

"Damn!" said the Professor. "They are out of range."

Jorvan drew himself laboriously off the controls. The throbbing was gone, although he still felt sick and dizzy, and he wondered what had saved them. One hand still gripped the two levers, Earth hung below them in the screen, and he had his answer.

He laughed shortly and looked round. The others were recovering, one of them still with a maniacal glare in his eyes. His grim glance saw that the man would not recover from the vibrator for a long time, if at all.

The pilot took over the controls again, flushing with shame as he saw the changed position of the copper levers.

"It was no conscious effort," Jorvan said grimly. "I fell on the controls."

"What now, Commander?"

"Take care of any more men who are still affected—then fire the projectile."

The observer outside the house at Project Four, scanning the sky, threw himself down and hoped for the best when the projectile whistled down.

He picked himself up again a few seconds later, surprised to find himself still in one piece. Approaching the newcomer cautiously, he saw an opening had appeared in it, and nearly jumped out of his skin as a curt voice spoke in heavily accented English, apparently coming from a copper grid.

"This is Jorvan. Fetch whoever is in charge of Project Four."

"Sure," gulped the American observer. "Hang on," as if the projectile was going to up and walk away.

He did not have to do any fetching. Lawrence was one of the bunch that ran from the house to see what was going on.

"Hey, Professor," he bawled. "There's some sort of flying radio just waltzed in. Jorvan wants to speak to you."

"Jorvan!" Lawrence crossed quickly to the projectile, standing in front of the copper grid. "Lawrence speaking," he said curtly. "What do you want?"

"I have proposals to discuss with you. Switch off your vibrator and . . ."

"Do you take us for fools?" he interrupted angrily.

"No," the alien said quietly. "I have a great respect for Project Four—that is why I do not wish to destroy it." Was that a scarcely veiled threat. "I will come alone in a scout ship," the alien continued, and as the Professor still hesitated. "I prefer to discuss certain proposals with you, but I could, of course, place another projectile nearer to the house, this time of a more deadly nature."

Lawrence clenched his hands impotently. So it had been a threat.

"All right," he said shortly. "The vibrator will be switched off," and he walked back into the house with Jane, silencing the questions around him with a brief shrug of his shoulders.

Entering his study he stood thoughtfully in the middle of the carpet for a moment, while Jane took a key from the drawer of his desk and brought out two small black objects from a locked cupboard on the wall.

His brows lifted questioningly as she handed one of the revolvers to him, but he took it nevertheless and dropped it in the still open drawer.

"Are you staying?"

"Yes. I do not trust any alien, let alone Jorvan himself," she replied grimly. "I wish I had made sure that I had killed him."

Lawrence looked at her quickly. "Do you?" and it seemed as if he was questioning her statement.

Jane threw him a puzzled look, but did not have time to go further into the matter. The door opened and Jorvan himself was brought in. His eyes went immediately to the girl, saw one hand hidden in her skirt and, reading her mind, knew what it held. His own weapons had already been taken from him.

"Sit down," Lawrence said gravely. "What is it you have to discuss?"

"The terms of your surrender," Jorvan stated deliberately.

Lawrence stiffened and Jane's fingers closed convulsively around the gun.

"What are those terms?" the former asked quietly.

"No reprisals will be made for the activities of Project Four, nor will your lives be interfered with in any way, so long as you do not work against us. We need every available scientist and craftsman in the rebuilding of Earth." He rose suddenly to his feet, towering over them. "I should advise you to accept. Should you think of keeping me as a hostage," he added "I can send

telepathic orders for this station to be destroyed, although I have no desire to die. In any case there has already been killing enough."

"The only way there can be peace is when all the aliens are gone," Jane said coldly.

"Even if I wished to do so, I could not order my men to leave. They would not go. As it is I can assure you they will not interfere unnecessarily with either the liberty or the persons of the Earth people, if they will cease this futile resistance."

Lawrence was silent a moment, thoughtful, then glanced at his daughter.

"Do you mind leaving us for a moment, Jane?"

She rose to her feet, dropping the gun into a pocket, an action not missed by the alien.

"So you did not need it after all."

"I don't trust aliens," she returned pointedly.

For a brief moment the ghost of a smile reached the thin lips and one hand touched his helmeted head.

"I know."

Lawrence looked genuinely astonished as his daughter made her exit accompanied by a violent slam of the door.

She prowled restlessly around in the next room. Through the walls she could hear the sound of voices, the slow soft one of her father, the sharp, clipped, tones of the alien, but could distinguish nothing of what was said.

It was not until nearly an hour later that Lawrence entered and she noticed at once the new hope in his eyes. He was grave, but the weary beaten look had disappeared, as if he saw some bright vista beyond the black ruins. She could think of only one thing to cause that.

"They are going?"

"No. They cannot go. Earth needs them now," he said simply. "No, wait until I have finished," he added quickly, as she went to speak. "Project Four is an isolated outpost, a relic of a civilisation that is gone for good. Things outside are worse than we thought. The Governments have crumbled, food is scarce, and people have taken to wandering around in tribes, fighting savagely for bits of food and general salvage. Without some strong, organised, force to drag them back to sanity, they will become wholly savages. The only force of that kind left is the aliens. Pride can be a good thing," he said slowly, "but this time we must swallow it. They have given us the chance to co-operate, when quite easily Jorvan could have given an order to destroy us."

She bit her lips, obviously seeing his point of view. "Are things outside very bad then?"

"Terrible. It needs very little to send Earth back to the Stone Age. If the aliens went, even supposing they were willing to do so, which they are not, civilisation on Earth is finished for hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of years."

"And if they stay?"

"Since there are no Governments left on Earth, Jorvan says it will have to be on Kalerin lines, but he assures us that such a way of life may eventually be even better than our past one. But he wants the co-operation of the Earth people, especially any survivors such as ourselves who have the confidence

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of the people. There is to be no slavery. Kalerins and Earth people are to be equals."

"You believe this," she said incredulously "from the man who is responsible for the death of millions of our people?"

"Yes. One thing we did not know. There were two camps on the moon. Jorvan was in charge of one. The Commander of the whole fleet was in the camp that Mike destroyed. Even his own men called him 'the butcher'. He decided there were too few of them against a whole planet. His idea, after bringing prisoners from Earth to learn our languages and the general situation down here, was to cause a war and whittle down those odds."

"Which he did very thoroughly," she said bitterly. "And you would still trust Jorvan after that?"

"I make no excuses for Jorvan, he is an alien, but he was not the man who ordered the bombing. He said nothing, but I think from his tone that he was never in favour of it. As soon as he was in charge he came out into the open. We fought, and he was forced to retaliate. There were too few of them to risk losing their ships." Jane broke in with an exclamation something like a snort, but as she said no more, he continued. "We must work with them, because without them we have no chance. With them we shall gain a thousand, perhaps more, years of progress. The price we pay has been, and will be, high, although progress is never bought cheaply, but," he added, and his eyes suddenly lit up "it will be our own sons and daughters who will inherit the new Earth."

She had been pacing the carpet like a predatory feline, but stopped dead as the portent of his words suddenly struck her.

"You mean . . . ?" she began incredulously. "You mean that as they are Kalerin naval ships . . ."

"There are no Kalerin women on board," he finished for her. "Precisely my dear. They will have to marry Earth women. You know what usually happens to an occupational army cut off from the parent body. They are eventually absorbed."

"I see," she said slowly. "A sort of 'loser take all', instead of the other way round." Then her eyes lit to anger. "What makes you think Earth women will bear children in whose veins will run the blood of the murderers of their own menfolk?"

"They are not unattractive," he said quietly. "And if there is unwillingness, there is also hypnosis." He looked at her searchingly. "You are young, physically a . . . a fine specimen . . ." with a glimmer of a smile "and have a brain above average. Do not think you will escape."

"I would use the vibrator on myself first," she retorted instantly.

"Perhaps, perhaps not. I think somehow that you are to play an important part in the future of Earth. Words are great deceivers. I cannot read your mind—but Jorvan can," and for the second time that day he heard a door slam to mark her exit.

That night he watched the mountains, bathed in the white moonlight. Beyond were the ruins of once great cities. It was not those pitiful remains he saw but, a glorious nebulous dream come true, rising phoenixlike from her ashes, strange and slightly alien, but mightier than she had ever been—the new Earth.

THE END

SCIENCE-FANTASY